



THE STORY OF
PHILIP METHUEN

BY MRS J.H. NEEDELL



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W. J. C. 8. M.

THE

STORY OF PHILIP METHUEN

“ It is not growing like a tree
In bulk, doth make man better be ;
Or standing like an oak three hundred year,
To fall a log at last, dry, bald, and sere.
In small proportions we just beauties see,
And in short measures Life may perfect be.”

—BEN JONSON.

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STORY OF PHILIP METHUEN

BY

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'LUCIA, HUGH, AND ANOTHER'

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THE STORY OF PHILIP METHUEN.

CHAPTER XVII.

“All men do err, because that men they be;
And men with beauty blinded cannot see.”

—PEELE.

“Sin of self-love possesseth all mine eye,
And all my soul, and all my every part;
And for this sin there is no remedy,
It is so grounded inward in my heart.”

—SHAKESPEARE'S *Sonnets*.

ADRIAN's temper was by no means mollified on his return home by the reception given to his news of Methuen's summary departure. Sir Walter Earle, who had a considerable share of curiosity to satisfy as well as goodwill to express, felt himself decidedly aggrieved; Miss Earle, who had a deep-rooted dislike to paragons, and a generous resentment against

the allowed superiority of this paragon in particular, characterised his conduct as ostentatious and affected; and the two girls, Honour and Anna, were each in their way profoundly disappointed.

Honour felt a secret shame and pain that she had looked forward with such strong interest to again meeting a man who had proved his own indifference to the memories of the past; and Anna complained bitterly, as was her wont, and with the manner assumed by those who consider themselves robbed of their rights.

Infatuated as Adrian Earle was, interpreting her moods and manifestations with an ingenious self-delusion, at which Love himself must have laughed, he could not persuade himself, as his anger cooled, to risk the overthrow of all his hopes while Anna barely showed him civility.

This girl was precisely of the nature to hold cheap what was pressed on her acceptance; and the more patient and obvious was any man's devotion, the more scornful and negligent would her behaviour become.

The one justification of the heartlessness of

her conduct was to be found in the singular and engrossing passion (for no other word would fitly describe the nature of her regard) which she felt for Philip Methuen. All the little there was of good in her went to the making of it:—the inexpressible bond of early association, and of an imaginative and neglected child's gratitude for great and unaccustomed kindness, as shown not only to herself, but to the dear, never-to-be-forgotten father. It might be said she owed to Methuen every good gift in life she had received, from the time when she had learnt her letters at his knees to the present hour which saw her, equally through his efforts, fitted to take her stand in society as any man's equal. It was he who induced Mrs Sylvestre to receive her, and had engaged Honour Aylmer's serviceable kindness in her behalf. To him she acknowledged she owed her first glimpses of moral and spiritual truth, though they were of very little abstract importance in her reckoning except as opening channels for more frequent and intimate association.

In the past she had been the recipient only;

in the future she was to equalise their relations by the gift of herself.

She had grown up from childhood with the impression that he belonged to her, having pledged himself to lifelong affection and devotion to her interests ; her father had died leaning on these assurances, and there was only one way of fulfilling them. There was so much of hot Italian blood in her veins, that even if the conviction of his indifference had been brought home to her mind, she would still have been prepared to insist on her rights and overwhelm his reluctance. As the case stood, she considered beauty the master - element of love ; and had not kind nature made her, Anna Trevlyan, too beautiful for any man to resist ?

On the plane of physical perfection, she allowed Philip Methuen to be her equal. As a very young girl, she distinctly remembered her father's observations on this point : he would often express a thorough contempt for Philip's devout piety and exaggerated unselfishness ; but on the theme of his personal strength and beauty, he would dilate with the uncompro-

mising zeal of a passionate artist steeped in materialism. Can we blame her that, regarding her father as a being of a higher order than herself—it was a grain of saving salt in her character—she imbibed such notions with the tenacity of her age, and ever afterwards, more or less, graduated her estimates by them?

If any one, knowing the secrets of her heart,—and she was discreet enough to be secret,—had expostulated with Anna Trevelyan on the unwomanliness and indelicacy of her position, she would have laughed such scruples to scorn. What was life but the brief term of human existence, into which the wise and the fortunate press all that they can of personal gratification?

Her happiness rested on one basis—union with the man she loved, and no conventional difficulties or ethical scruples should prevent her turning to her own advantage every chance and circumstance in her favour.

That he had passed through London without coming to see her, and being subjected to the influences of her perfected beauty,—for no one knew better than Anna herself what the last

three years had done for her,—was a provocation hard to bear, the only consolation being that Honour Aylmer had been equally powerless to attract him. She had the glaring indelicacy to question Adrian Earle closely in respect to the changes and improvements which time had wrought in Methuen's personal appearance, and he the almost inconceivable blindness to attribute such eagerness to the innocent ardour of her childish friendship. To be sure, he might be excused for thinking that the delicate and subtle passion he recognised as love could never take so bold a front.

Perhaps it is hardly necessary to say that the women of the Earlescourt family were not equally blind to Anna Trevelyan's shortcomings. Miss Earle entertained a robust and uncompromising dislike to the beautiful defiant girl who accepted favours as her right, and repudiated the obligation of gratitude. The delicate generosity of all the rest of the family was in opposition to her, or she would certainly have shut the door of intimacy against Anna Trevelyan long before the infatuation of her

nephew served her as a weapon of offence in her indignant controversies with her brother.

Sir Walter Earle had implicit faith in his own theory that it was best to give a red-hot lover his head, and that no one but Anna herself would be able to cure Adrian of his folly. He was so convinced that his son had no chance of success with the girl, as to consider himself able to act the part of indulgent parent with perfect safety.

To Honour Aylmer's mind, the character of her so-called friend was not so much matter for repulsion or condemnation as of a sort of divine pity and regret. That a girl so splendidly endowed should lack, as she well knew she lacked, every quality of the soul which makes for righteousness—all the finer instincts and desires which lift humanity out of the brutal element incorporate with it—seemed infinitely more pitiable than any physical deformity or deficiency could have been. It pierced her tender heart that the sweet and sensitive Adrian should lavish his love on a girl who was as indifferent to his homage as any Buddhist

idol to its Hindu worshipper ; and she was cruelly divided between the wish that he might get the desire of his heart, and the conviction that his success would be the worst thing which could happen to him.

On the other hand, to associate the idea of Philip Methuen with Anna was, if possible, still more repugnant to her feelings. So absolute was the incongruity, that it would be, morally, like binding the living to the dead ; but here she consoled herself with the belief that no such catastrophe was to be apprehended. He was strong enough to take care of himself.

A few days after Philip's return to Skeffington, he wrote to Sir Walter Earle apologising for his apparent neglect of his kindness, and stating that he had found his uncle so much worse than he had expected, that it would be for the present quite impossible to leave him ; consequently, he had been obliged to dismiss the hope of making his explanation in person.

This letter decided Anna Trevelyan to cut short her visit to her friends and return home at once to the vicarage. Her desire, or rather

her determination, to see Philip Methuen at once, and place their relations on a more certain and recognised basis, was growing to an intolerable height; and since there was now no chance of meeting him in town, she had no longer a wish to remain there. The difficulties of her position seemed rather to stimulate than restrain her purpose.

It was obvious to Anna that, when she declared her intentions, the Earle family expressed no more reluctance at the prospect of her departure than kindness and courtesy demanded —a circumstance that, in her passionate and unreasonable mind, went far to wipe out the long record of services received.

On the evening before her departure, it happened that Adrian, coming in early after a weary afternoon, spent by stress of social necessity at Lord's, found Anna alone in the drawing-room.

She was sitting indolently reclining amidst the many cushions of a low couch, with that air—half-weary, half-scornful—which was characteristic of her. She held an open book be-

tween her fingers; but she seldom read consecutively, and needlework was never seen in her hands except under Mrs Sylvestre's compulsion. Her attire struck Adrian's fastidious eye as in exquisite keeping with her beauty. She wore a dark crimson gown, the soft fabric of which, unbroken by flounce or frill, fell in straight, statuesque folds to her feet, defining the noble lines and curves of her perfect form.

She raised her eyes as Adrian entered, and dropped them again immediately without speaking. He was looking worn and wan, and there was an intense repressed irritability in his manner. His face lightened, however, at the sight of her.

“Alone, Anna!”

“You see I am alone. Miss Earle and Honour are at Lady Isbister's concert. I saw the card of invitation.—My name was not mentioned, but yours was. Why are you not there?”

“I was going, but I have changed my mind. What is Lady Isbister's concert to me in com-

parison with this room with you in it? Anna, what am I to say to you? I have held my peace till the fire burns. If I speak too soon, I cannot help it; but—be kind to me!"

He pulled a chair close to her sofa, and sat down. He was jaded in body and mind and intoxicated by her beauty. One of her arms, bare to the elbow, was carelessly thrown over the padded side of the couch, and looked lustrous as the evening light fell upon it. Adrian stooped suddenly and pressed his lips upon the soft warm flesh, in an eager, burning kiss.

"I love you! I love you! I love you!" he repeated, with passionate iteration. "Anna, I say again—be kind to me!"

The girl sprang up from her seat with as vehement a movement of angry recoil as if some noisome creature had touched her. She rubbed her handkerchief with almost savage energy on the spot his lips had pressed, and looked at him with her eyes dilating and her delicate nostrils quivering, under her sense of outrage.

"How dare you insult me like that? Have

I ever wanted your love, or tried to please you as other girls do ? Has there ever been a look, or word, or touch of mine that could encourage you to expect anything from me ? You know there has not!—that if behaviour could kill love, yours by this time should have no life in it ! It is what I have tried for—to appear so hateful, that you should cease to care for me !”

The passion of her repudiation stung his manhood to a measure of self-assertion.

“And why have you done this ?” he asked, straightening his figure and meeting her flashing eyes without wavering. “Why has my love no value to you ? What right have you, above other women, to reject it with anger and scorn ? What I offer you is the best a man has to give.”

“That does not matter, when the gift is unacceptable ! I do not mean to hurt or insult you more than another. I hold every man’s love cheap, simply because I do not want it.”

She paused a minute, as if searching for reasons, then added quickly—

“Besides, I am quite sure you would never persuade your family and friends to give me a welcome.”

A sudden flicker of hope sprang up in his heart, and his face brightened.

“I have my father’s full permission to win you, if I can.”

“It is very good of Sir Walter Earle to give you leave,” she answered, scornfully; “but I shall not put his magnanimity to the test,—and you must quite clearly understand that I mean every word I have just now spoken, and that this subject must never be mentioned between us again. Shall I tell you what you had better do?—make up your quarrel with Honour Aylmer—no other woman will ever suit you half so well.”

“Ah!” he answered; “that comes either of your ignorance of what love is, or of the insolence of your youth and beauty. Honour Aylmer is a better woman than you, and almost as handsome; but it is you—you only—that I want, Anna”—he came a little nearer to her, moved by the instinct of appeal—“there is nothing

your heart can desire that it will not be in my power to give you. You shall order our lives as you like—on any lines, in any lands—only I must have your love !”

“Have you, then, some love-philtre at command ?” was her answer. “You bribe high, Mr Earle ; but you may have read as well as I, that love is not to be bought, nor will it come at word of command. What am I to say to you ? If you could give me all the kingdoms of the earth, as well as Earlescourt, I would not marry you !”

His face flushed with pain and anger. “It will not be necessary to say much more ; there is a limit even to my subserviency ; you leave me no loophole for self-deception. I will give it up, Anna, but—you shall tell me for whom !”

The colour faded out of his face, and a light came into his eyes which she had never seen there before, and which fascinated her gaze—his voice even had taken a tone of harshness quite foreign to its habitual sweetness. “For whose sake,” he added, incisively, “do you treat me

with this insufferable arrogance ? Is it for Philip Methuen's ? ”

He caught her hand as he spoke, not from any motive of endearment, but as if to make sure that she should stand and abide his question ; and he searched her face with a hard scrutiny which it was difficult for even her to encounter without flinching.

A flame of colour suddenly dyed the pure pallor of her skin, but the very consciousness of her involuntary weakness was a challenge to her courage. She met Adrian's peremptory, relentless gaze with a superb movement of defiance.

“ Yes,” she answered, giving to each word she spoke a metallic clearness of utterance ; “ you have guessed right, though you had no right to guess — it is for Philip Methuen's sake.”

An indefinable expression came over Adrian's face ; he dropped her hand and turned a little aside. Love and hate, pity and revenge—passions hitherto unknown to his experience—divided his heart between them. No sweet

reasonableness governed his love for Anna Trevelyan : he loved her because her beauty, audacity, and brilliant gifts stirred the languid pulses of his soul ; and such love is not scrupulous as to the means of satisfaction.

Why should he not help himself in his defeat to the weapons Methuen had inadvertently put into his hands ? Why ? Because the bias of character, and the instincts of a gentleman, do not yield to the first assaults of temptation, even of a temptation so potent as his.

“ It was a question I had no right to ask,” he said, after a pause ; “ but your answer is conclusive. I have done, Anna.”

She felt for him more under this new aspect of restraint and forbearance—felt, by instinct, that a deeper depth had been stirred than she had suspected. She went up to him and touched his arm with her hand.

“ Do not hate me for what I have said ! I should not like to think of you in the future as unhappy, when things will be so different with me. But—you don’t take things very much to heart.”

He smiled a little, and put her hand gently to his lips.

“I have done with protestations, Anna. But a time may come in your life when you may stand in need of comfort—if it should, send for me! I shall always love you as I love you now.”

He opened the door noiselessly after his fashion, and went out.

CHAPTER XVIII.

“ Rarely, rarely comest thou,
Spirit of delight ;
Wherefore hast thou left me now
Many a day and night ?”

—SHELLEY.

“The persons whose tempers are most distinguished for bigotry are those which have drunk most sparingly, if at all, of the water of life.”

ON the afternoon of the following day, Anna Trevelyan stepped out on the platform of Trichester station and looked eagerly about her. The scene had become very familiar to her : it was now nearly four years since she had seen it first, and she had outgrown or overcome much of the childish misery of those days. Life lay before her, touched with a radiance almost as warm and as penetrating as the midsummer sun over her head. Only at this precise moment a shade was certainly thrown across her path, and was reflected in the angry gloom of her face.

The station-master, who was well acquainted with her, and with her intimacy with the Earles-court family, came forward civilly to speak to her.

“Miss Sylvestre is waiting outside in the pony-carriage, Miss Trevelyan; there is a cart for your luggage.”

“Is there no one else?” asked Anna. “I will wait a few minutes.”

The man hesitated. “Shall I speak to Miss Sylvestre?” he asked. “It is Miss Dorothy Sylvestre.”

A frown of impatience contracted the girl’s forehead; she was suffering from intense mental strain.

“I will speak to her myself,” she answered; and going outside the station, where Dorothy sat patiently waiting in the little low-backed basket-carriage, which always moved Anna’s contempt, she stooped over her and kissed her quickly, as if anxious to meet, almost to anticipate, her greetings. “I am glad it is you, Dolly, but I am not quite ready. Will you mind waiting a few minutes?”

“I don’t mind waiting a bit; only mamma said we were to make haste home, so as not to keep them waiting for tea.” Then her innocent blue eyes wandered admiringly over her cousin’s person. “How beautiful you look, Anna, and what a lovely gown! Wasn’t it a pity to travel in it?”

Anna’s clouded eyes were traversing the highroad which led in the direction of Skeffington so far as they were able to follow it, but neither pedestrian nor vehicle were in sight. The passengers by the late train were rapidly dispersing, the driver of the railway omnibus being the last to move off, putting his whip to his hat as he passed the Skeffington ladies.

The little lad who had driven the light cart which fulfilled so many functions in the modest Sylvestre household, had helped the porter to deposit Anna’s boxes and wraps in it, and now stood waiting for the word of command. Anna gave it at last with the haughty unsympathetic air which was characteristic of her, and after a further interval of moody watchfulness, at last took her place beside Dorothy.

“Put the thing in motion!” she said; “we shall scarcely get home before dark.”

Dolly obeyed, with a half-shy glance at her cousin.

“Are you vexed about coming home?” she asked. “I am afraid mamma is not pleased. Do you mind telling me why you did not stay longer?”

“Because I discovered it was time to come home, if I did not mean to wear out my welcome. By the way—wonders will never cease! —I see the pony has got a new collar.”

“Yes,” cried Dorothy, brightening, “I was sure you would notice it. Doesn’t he look nice?”

“One degree less abject than usual,” said Anna, ungraciously. “Do you know, Dolly, I would positively prefer to walk the eight miles’ distance than drive in such a miserable little rattle-trap as this! I feel the same contempt for myself as every one else feels who looks at us. It is as incongruous as it would be to see a beggar or a pauper lolling in one of the Earle’s fine carriages.”

“It is an incongruity you will have to put

up with, or else return to the friends you have left," returned her cousin with some spirit; but at the same moment Anna suddenly snatched the reins from her hands.

"Not that way," she said, harshly; "we will drive through the Park."

"If we do," replied Dolly—knowing from previous experience that opposition would be useless—"it will be only fair for you to take the blame on yourself. Mamma is sure to question us, and it will be a bad beginning for your return home."

"I can bear it," said Anna; but even as she spoke her voice fell a little, and the tears of her bitter disappointment gathered in her eyes. No further appeal was wanted.

"Keep the reins," said Dolly, softly, "while I open the gate."

Anna accepted the arrangement as a matter of course.

"Drive slowly," she said, as Dolly resumed her place beside her, "and stop a minute when we are in sight of the house. We shall be at the vicarage only too soon."

“Papa says the gardens never used to be kept in such exquisite order,” remarked Dolly, flicking off the flies from her pony’s neck as he stood panting at his ease on the crest of the little hill which commanded a view of Methuen Place; “but to me it never looks a bit changed. When Mr Methuen came home a week or two ago from India, after three years’ absence, I wonder if he saw any difference?”

“Have you seen him?” asked Anna, sharply, searching the front of the house and the terrace on which the rooms opened, with a scrutiny from which not even a sparrow would have been able to escape.

“No one has seen him, I believe, but Mr Oliver. Poor Sir Giles is dangerously ill, and worse since Mr Methuen came home. Doesn’t it seem a pity! They say he never leaves his uncle.”

Anna turned very pale. “Dangerously ill! do you mean he will not get any better? I notice the fountain is not playing.”

“It is too near Sir Giles’s window, and he cannot bear the sound of the water,” explained Dolly. “Dr Farquhar told mamma.”

“Drive on, Dolly, and make haste home :
there is nothing to wait for.”

The village and vicarage-house of Skeffington look as little changed for the four years during which Anna had known it, as the old grey mansion-house of the Methuens. The ivy had climbed a little higher up the square church tower, and the myrtle-tree which covered the side-walls of the parsonage had increased the bulk of its stem and taken a deeper tone upon its lustrous twigs. The gnarled branches of the old apple-trees in the orchard had given themselves another twist, and the moss and lichen were thicker upon them ; but the garden itself, with its small circular grass-plat and trim borders, was as stiff and unattractive as ever. The blossoming shrubs in which Anna delighted, and which relieved it from absolute ugliness, had flowered and faded early in the forward spring, and had nothing now to show her but their dull foliage ; and Mrs Sylvestre’s gaunt geraniums and ill-grown fuchsias still stood in their ugly wire receptacles under the porch, precisely as they had done on the night when

Philip Methuen made his first appeal on behalf of her niece.

As Anna got out of the pony-carriage and went into the house, she had an impatient weary impression of the unchanged conditions of her life, and of the time having arrived when they were become unbearable.

Mrs Sylvestre rose from her seat and took a few steps to meet her across the floor of her drawing-room, meagre and colourless as ever. It seemed to the girl that no change whatever had passed over the pale keen face, with its prominent blue eyes, thin lips, and high narrow forehead, over which the skin seemed too tightly drawn to admit of lines or wrinkles, since the miserable day when she had first seen it. Also, oddly enough, her first words were almost identical with those she had spoken on that occasion.

“ Make haste and take off your things, Anna ; your uncle is come in, and tea has been waiting for some time.”

Anna paused, then asked in a clear firm voice—

“Are there any letters for me?” and met Mrs Sylvestre’s cold gaze of surprise with the defiant composure which that lady was wont to characterise as effrontery.

“As there is only one family with whom you correspond, and you have just left their roof, for reasons still to be explained, I am at a loss to understand from whom you could expect a letter.”

“Does that mean there are no letters for me?” repeated Anna.

“There are no letters for you,” replied her aunt, sternly, and surveying her with growing dissatisfaction, not only because her inquiry was a suspicious one, and would need to be investigated, but also because she could not blind herself to the fact that not a month passed over the girl’s head without adding something to the perfection of a beauty she could neither deny nor forgive.

Anna went slowly up-stairs and sat down in the window-seat of her bedroom, as she had done on the first day of her arrival; and if she did not bow her head on her hands and weep, it

was only because she had gained a little since then in self-control. She was quite miserable enough.

Dolly had already put away her hat and jacket, and was smoothing her fair hair before the glass. How meagre and despicable looked all the appointments of the room, in Anna's angry sight!

"Anna, dear," said her cousin, timidly, "won't you get ready for tea?"

Anna dashed off her hat, and unwound from her stately throat the magnificent scarf of black Spanish lace, which made the only difference between her indoor and outdoor toilet: it was one of Honour's frequent and little-considered gifts. Then she suddenly clasped her hands before her eyes as if to shut out the sight of external things.

"I don't think I can bear it!" she cried, in a low inward voice, charged with the passionate irritability from which she was suffering.

Even the gentle spirit of Dolly rebelled a little.

"Bear what?" she asked. "What I and Lucy and Mary bear all the year round? What

did you expect to find when you came home? You know how things always go on. I can't understand why you didn't stay longer with the Earles—it is so odd to leave London in June!"

The words recalled Anna to a sense of discretion: if she were to carry out the vague purpose she had in view, she must be careful to keep her own counsel.

It was by no means impossible for her to play a part when she recognised the necessity of doing so, and for the rest of the evening she did her best to behave in such a way as should serve to disarm her aunt's already excited suspicions and win her young cousin's goodwill. She lavished upon the latter trinkets and dainty accessories of dress which had cost her nothing, and to which she was constitutionally indifferent: endured Mrs Sylvestre's cross-examination respecting the London *ménage* of the Earlescourt family, and her uncle's prosy inquiries as to the business of the "House," on which subject he seemed to expect Anna's information to be authoritative, on the strength of her occasional presence in the Ladies' Gallery.

It is almost unnecessary to say that the scheme which this ardent and self-willed girl was planning was the gaining of an interview with Philip Methuen ; but the difficulties which beset it baffled her ingenuity.

It happened that at this time Dr Farquhar, the chief medical practitioner of Trichester, and Sir Giles's daily attendant, was also visiting her youngest cousin Mary for some temporary ailment ; and as Mrs Sylvestre's repugnance to the faith of the master of Methuen Place did not go far enough to destroy her interest in his condition and affairs, Anna had the limited satisfaction of hearing something that helped to guide her conclusions.

Dr Farquhar was a short, stout, red-faced man, whose general appearance suggested the idea of a well-to-do country farmer rather than of a professional man of some considerable distinction ; but no acute observer who had read the signs of the close well-cut mouth, of the grey eyes deep set in their sockets, and keen and clear with the vigilance of an intelligence which never seemed to slumber or sleep, and of

the huge forehead with its equal development of the reflective and perceptive faculties (to borrow the helpful phrases of an obsolete science), would have agreed with the popular judgment. It may also have been strengthened by the fact that Dr Farquhar's manners were a little harsh and abrupt, lacking entirely the deliberate courtesy and bland solicitude which are so influential an element of success with the average patient. His relations with the Sylvestre household were by no means intimate, and he was very chary of communicating any information respecting his professional experiences. He, however, allowed that the condition of Sir Giles Methuen, he being the great man of the neighbourhood, might excite a little legitimate curiosity.

In this way Mrs Sylvestre learnt that the old baronet was supposed to be gradually sinking, and that his nephew was in constant attendance upon him ; and these facts, when they reached Anna's ears, seemed to close the door of hope against her. Even she could not entertain the idea of forcing her way into Methuen

Place under such circumstances. Also, she was keenly aware of the necessity of concealing the depth of interest she took in the matter; she seldom saw Dr Farquhar herself, and if she had seen him, she durst not betray herself by direct inquiry. And so the weary fruitless weeks past on.

To add to her anxiety, the Earle family returned in due course to Earlescourt—or at least Miss Earle and Honour returned. Sir Walter had gone direct to his Scotch shooting-box as soon as Parliament rose; and Adrian, it was said, had accompanied him,—at any rate, he was not at Earlescourt.

Anna was in constant apprehension of Mrs Sylvestre becoming aware of her changed relations with her former friends, for she knew by instinct the facts would excite her violent displeasure and disappointment; and this anxiety led to rather more propriety of behaviour towards her aunt, which was not without its effect on the general tranquillity.

The year had now worn on to the middle of August, nearly two months since Philip

Methuen had returned from India, and still they had never met. Anna would have thought such a thing impossible at the time when she first returned to Skeffington ; but fate, she said to herself, was against her. The long strain, however, was telling, if not upon her health, which was of too vigorous a type to yield readily under mental pressure, upon her looks ; and she was conscious that her cheek was thinner and paler, and her eyes had lost something of their brightness.

It happened that Dr Farquhar made the same observation on one of the rare occasions when Anna was in the room during his professional call. He was taking leave of his little patient, more in the character of friend than physician, and consequently Mrs Sylvestre had not thought it necessary to dismiss her niece as usual.

“ I hope you won’t accuse me of wanting to fill Miss Mary’s vacant place, Mrs Sylvestre, if I venture to remark that this young lady is not looking well,” he said with a pleasant smile, glancing towards Anna, who was standing languidly leaning against the open window.

Mrs Sylvestre turned sharply round and looked at her.

“ My niece enjoys excellent health, Dr Farquhar. She is in the habit of boasting she never had a headache in her life ! There is nothing the matter with you, Anna, I believe ? ”

The tone was so hard and confident that it would have needed some courage to contradict her belief, and Anna’s energies were at a low ebb. Also, she hated the idea of being considered sick or ill.

“ Nothing,” she replied, “ except the heat ; ” and then she added, with sudden resolution—

“ Poor old Sir Giles Methuen must find this weather hard to bear.”

For once Mrs Sylvestre was willing to follow her niece’s lead ; she thought it was Anna’s way of turning the doctor’s attention from herself, and was prepared to commend her discretion.

“ An old man’s blood runs colder in his veins than yours, my dear young lady ; I don’t think Sir Giles Methuen suffers much from the heat.”

“ Is that unfortunate young man still in attendance upon him ? ” asked Mrs Sylvestre, in

the harsh grating tone which she instinctively adopted when touching upon the Methuen theme. “Why does not his uncle provide himself with a professional nurse?—is it selfishness or economy?”

“Excuse me, Mrs Sylvestre, I don’t quite catch your meaning. In what way is Mr Methuen, with his splendid prospects and—such as he is—to be considered unfortunate?”

“I allude to the lamentable circumstances of his education. Perhaps you may not be aware—it does not of course fall within your function—that he is more, far more, deeply dyed in superstition than the old baronet himself? The gifts of fortune or of nature, you will allow, Dr Farquhar, will scarcely compensate for this.”

“I have no opinion on such points; they do not, as you say, come within my function; but if it is the province of superstition to turn out such men as Philip Methuen, my experience inclines me to the wish that it were a little more generally influential.”

“I am astonished, doctor, to hear you express

yourself so lightly ! I do not deny that there are points of attraction in Sir Giles Methuen's nephew ; but if such is the case under the influence of a demoralising and soul-crushing religion, what might not such a young man have become if he had enjoyed the privilege of being brought up in the true faith ? ”

“ That is a question neither of us can answer, Mrs Sylvestre,” said the doctor, smiling a little impatiently. “ But you seemed anxious on the score of his comfort. I assure you he is in excellent health and condition — takes sufficient exercise, sees his friends at Earleswood occasionally, and duly goes to church.”

“ To church ! to Mass, do you mean ? But I understood he never left his uncle’s room.”

“ Then, my dear madam, you must have understood that we had all taken leave of our senses. Sir Giles, I cannot help telling you, behaves more like a saint than a sinner, and would be the last to exact injurious devotion from his heir ; on the contrary, their mutual consideration and affection, perfectly simple and unostentatious, is a lesson to all of us. As for

the professional nurse you appear to consider necessary, the poor old baronet is so reduced, a child almost might lift him; and I assure you neither his servant, housekeeper, nor Mr Methuen himself, would allow any stranger to touch him. Pray set your mind at ease; the sick-room is quite sufficiently manned."

Mrs Sylvestre was silent for a moment, and she did not observe that Dr Farquhar's eyes were closely observing Anna's downcast face and the nervous movement of her fingers, which she was clasping and unclasping in suppressed excitement.

"Were you aware," she resumed, with some hesitation, "that the vicar called a little while ago at Methuen Place, and was denied admission to the sick-room?"

"You must blame me for that! Nurses are bound to obey orders, and mine are decisive against visitors. But I believe your husband had no reason to complain of his reception—he saw Mr Methuen and took no offence."

Mrs Sylvestre shook her head.

"Extreme forbearance is my husband's weak

point. But the responsibility of cutting off that old man from perhaps his last chance of spiritual enlightenment, was too serious to be incurred for the sake of any mere physical advantage."

She made another little pause ; but Dr Farquhar had no mind to take up the challenge. Anna, who was tongue-tied for fear of self-betrayal, felt an emotion of positive gratitude towards her aunt when she asked presently, as if still brooding over the melancholy condition of her neighbours—

" You said the young man went to church. Do you mean, to that deplorable little barn at Crawford—in Carshalton Street, I think—which is dignified by its worshippers with the name of a chapel ? "

" The same ; though if you were acquainted with the inside as well as the out, you might correct your estimate. You will be pleased to hear he takes his constitutional every morning, rain or shine, to some early celebration, which is held before our good vicar is up :—sitting up at nights seems to make no difference. Somehow,

Mrs Sylvestre, that quiet unobtrusive sort of observance counts."

"Yes, as the mechanical prayers of the Mohammedan counts, and the devotional *katoo* of the Chinaman grovelling before his god—not otherwise. I must own it vexes me a little, Dr Farquhar, that my niece should have listened to your commendation of Roman Catholics ; it has been our object ever since she was under this roof to weaken the pernicious influences of her youth."

"I don't think I have done her much harm, or that there is much the matter with her after all," was the doctor's answer, as he shot his keen glance again in her direction.

Her figure had lost its languid droop, her whole aspect had undergone a change. An eager vitality now lighted up the face which had been so pale and spiritless a few moments before. When she shook hands with him, the firm flexible fingers closed over his with an unmistakable grasp of goodwill, and the intense indefinable look in her beautiful eyes almost sent a thrill into the celibate doctor's case-hardened heart.

“There is something in it,” he said to himself, as he climbed carefully into his saddle—the well-groomed and well-trained cob having stood during his visit patiently tethered to the vicarage garden-gate—“how much, I do not precisely see; but there is another point I do see with remarkable precision, that Anna Trevlyan is—well—let us say, such a young woman as one does not meet every day in one’s life.”

CHAPTER XIX.

“ One morning, oh ! so early, my beloved, my beloved,
All the birds were singing blithely, as if never they would cease ;
Let my voice be heard, that asketh not for fame and not for glory,
Give for all our life’s dear story,
Give us Love, and give us Peace ! ”

—JEAN INGELOW.

“ DOLLY,” said Anna, as the two girls entered their bedroom together soon after the ten o’clock reading of family prayers, and general dismissal of the household to bed, “ come and sit down by me—I have something to tell you. You are not sleepy, I hope ? ”

Dolly was sleepy : she had been trained to go to bed at a certain hour, and nature of course accommodated herself to the discipline ; also days of uneventful incident and dull routine are perhaps more exhausting than is generally supposed. There is no weariness so intense as that which comes of monotony.

“Something to tell me?” she answered, with a little quickening of interest; “is it about Adrian Earle?”

Anna made a gesture of repudiation; her movements were always wonderfully expressive. The slight flush that came into her face was not likely to be detected by the light of the solitary candle, which was considered quite sufficient for bedroom illumination by Mrs Sylvestre’s economy.

“Put out the candle, Dolly,” interposed Anna, with a fine accent of contempt—she always expressed herself as if her early experiences had been on a scale of wealth and splendour: “the moon is almost full,” drawing up the blind as she spoke, and throwing open the window; “who could want to go to bed on such a night as this?”

She leaned out of the window as far as safety would admit, into the pure illumined air, and drew a deep breath of irrepressible desire. Her whole being responded to the influences of the night: the moon was so bright that she could distinguish the gleam of the distant sea at the

point she knew well where to look for it ; the low range of hills, with their twin master-peaks, showed blackly against the heavenly background ; and the shadows of the trees and forefront of the house lay motionless on the grass. Now and again there was a faint stir in the branches, as some drowsy bird swerved or shifted its position, and through the serene hush of the night came the distant hooting of owls—a weird mysterious sound which seemed to give the finishing-touch to her mood of emotional excitement.

“Mother of God !” she murmured to herself (it was an echo of her childhood, and her nearest approach to devotion), “give me what I want ! I want so to be happy !”

The moment after she mocked herself with remorseless contempt. If she did want to be happy, it was only her own skill and daring which would get the victory for her, and the first step in that direction she was now fully prepared to take.

“Did you ever walk to Crawford, Dolly ?” she asked, retreating from the window with the

sudden apprehension that their voices might be overheard.

“Never! it is a good five miles.”

“And how long would that take to walk?”

“I can’t say exactly. What have you got in your head, Anna? If you want to go to Crawford, I daresay we can have the pony-carriage to-morrow.”

“I want to attend Mass at the Catholic chapel to-morrow morning, at the early celebration. When I say I *want*, my meaning is that I am resolved to go.”

Dolly, who was in the act of loosening the shining plaits of her golden hair, suffered her arms to drop suddenly to her side; she turned upon her cousin open-mouthed with surprise.

“You! why, I have heard you make fun of the service scores of times! Why do you want to go? Mamma would never forgive you, Anna.”

“But I shall manage in such a way that she will never know. I want you to help me, Dolly. You must go with me!—we can easily get out of the drawing-room window.”

“But we cannot easily fasten it again ! The servant will tell. It is out of the question, Anna. I should be frightened to death. Besides, it is too far to walk ; we should have to get up before it was light. It would be quite a disgraceful thing to do, and—what for ?”

Anna hesitated a moment ; then slowly raising her arms above her head, and suffering them to fall to her sides again with a singular but expressive movement habitual to her moods of excitement, she answered clearly—

“I want to speak to Philip Methuen.”

“Oh !” was Dolly’s response, in an accent of unmistakable reprobation ; “I could not do that, it would be dreadfully improper ! Besides, Anna, we should be sure to be found out —some one would see us and tell, and I don’t know how mamma would punish us. We should be going against her on so many points, we should deserve—”

She stopped short ; Anna’s look of passionate scorn almost frightened her.

“Do not speak another word, Dolly ; you are a miserable little fool ! I shall go all the

same, only I shall go alone. No, I don't want to hear the sound of your voice again."

"I would do it if I could," said Dolly, helplessly; but Anna vouchsafed no answer.

It was a long time before Dolly sobbed herself to sleep that night. She tried to renew her remonstrances, but her cousin silenced her with almost brutal contempt. Anna herself lay open-eyed through all the long hours of the night, never for a moment swerving from her purpose.

At one time the idea occurred to her that she would so far alter her programme as to lie in wait for Philip nearer his own house—it would save time and fatigue; but the fear of missing him led her to return to her original plan.

If she arrived first at the chapel, she could not possibly fail in her object.

At five o'clock in the morning she got up and looked at the weather. The sun was barely risen, and the heavens were overcast with clouds. Already a few drops of rain had fallen. The outside world looked indescribably

chill and depressing: the charm, the allure-
ment of last night, were as extinct as if they
had never existed. Dolly was asleep, but turn-
ing restlessly on her pillow. For a moment
Anna's resolution faltered. Then she renewed
it with tenfold stringency. Was it not from
such a life as now shut her in that she was
going to escape?

She made a careful and judicious toilet. There was a chilliness in the air that induced her to put on the faultless dark-grey ulster which Miss Earle had given her as a parting gift, and which, as revealing the grace and admirable symmetry of her person, was the most becoming garment she could have worn. She had a dainty close-fitting hat which matched it, accommodating itself to the massive coils of her hair, to the delicate finely cut face and the magnificent dark eyes, as the last harmonious touch of a perfect picture. It vexed her sense of congruity that she felt constrained to carry an umbrella; but although the rain was not at that moment falling, the skies threatened a downfall.

Just as she was ready to leave the room Dolly opened her eyes. She glanced with a momentary bewilderment at her cousin, and then the remembrance of last night rushed back on her mind. In a moment she had sprung out of bed and seized Anna's hand.

“Oh, Anna, do not go! I beseech you, do not go!”

Anna's only answer was a contemptuous gesture of repulsion.

“Then wait a few minutes,” said Dolly, pushing back the cloud of fair hair from her face, and looking up at her cousin with a sort of martyr resolution—“wait, and I will go with you!”

“You will not go with me, for there is no time to wait; besides, you could not walk so fast as I. I will go alone. You can please yourself about betraying me.”

She turned and went out of the room.

There was no difficulty about getting out of the house. Anna walked straight into the drawing-room, guiding her way carefully so as to make no noise in the imperfect light, opened

the shutter of the window against which she had been leaning during Dr Farquhar's yesterday's visit—it seemed longer ago than that—and let herself out into the garden.

The garden-gate was never locked. There was a bolt easy enough to withdraw, and in a few minutes more Anna was walking swiftly on the highroad to Crawford.

Her first sensation, in spite of her high spirit, was one of extreme nervousness. Since she had been grown up—rather since she had been in England—she had never been out of doors so early before. There was something foreign and unaccustomed in the aspect of things,—the world seemed still asleep. Her own footsteps were almost the only sound she heard, except the flutter and twitter of the uprousing birds, and the plaintive bleat of some sheep in the fields which she skirted. After a time she encountered farm-labourers at intervals, trudging heavily along the roads to their respective labour, with no more elasticity in their gait or vitality in their faces than when they had exchanged “good night” at sundown

yesterday, with any passing stranger. Sleep had revived their physical forces enough for the weary round of the day's work, but allowed of no reserve of energy for any human function beyond mere physical sensation. Now and again some man, younger and more alert than his fellows, stared hard at Anna, with a confused sense of pleasure and then of surprise ; but beyond standing still to look after her for a moment, he gave no sign and offered no interruption.

It was otherwise, however, when she drew near the town.

Crawford was the seat of a thriving local industry, and flocks of men and girls were wending their way to the different mills, not with the bovine docility of the agricultural labourer, but with coarse laughter, gross jest, and a good deal of indiscriminate horse-play.

Some of the women intentionally jostled her in passing—all had their keen criticisms to make on her dress and appearance ; and the men, or boys rather, offered her compliments that brought the blood to her cheek. Anna

had the spirit of a lioness, but not even a lioness fights against stupendous odds ; and besides, it was a necessity to escape observation. She glided through the crowd as swiftly and silently as a shadow, with every pulse at fever-heat, and darting covert looks around.

Carshalton Street, in which the chapel stood, was one of the lowest thoroughfares in the town, and of the worst reputation, though naturally the girl was unacquainted with the fact. She saw, however, with her quick inclusive glance, that several spinning-ways opened direct upon the side-walk, and that knots of frowsy unkempt women, and rough brutalised-looking men, were standing together in the way she must go before she could reach the little building at the extreme end of the street.

Involuntarily she made a little pause to reconsider her position, and at the same moment she was aware of a swift firm step behind her, a light touch upon her shoulder, and turning almost with the impetus of light, she found herself face to face with Philip Methuen.

Thought and emotion have also the velocity of light, and the strongest currents of feeling may ebb and flow within limits inappreciable to time and space. It was perhaps scarcely within a moment's interval that Philip Methuen and Anna Trevelyan, thus strangely met after more than three years' separation, looked at each other in silence, but it was long enough for the one to imbibe a draught of sensation which permeated every nerve and fibre of her being with a rapture akin to intoxication; and for the other to perceive that the girl he had left behind him was grown into the most perfectly beautiful woman he had ever seen.

“Anna!” he exclaimed. “I need not ask if you are well; but what is the meaning of this? So far from home—alone—and in such a part of the town as this! It is well I am here to take care of you.”

She laughed with pleasure, deliciously conscious of a new life in the light of his countenance, and still holding the hand he had naturally extended, in a grasp of the tenacity of which she was scarcely aware.

“It is well!” she answered, in her low melodious voice. “Oh, Philip, how glad I am to see you! and — how splendid you have grown!”

He coloured a little, but her delight and ardour were so spontaneous, he had not the heart to check her; his feeling was how much of the impulsive child she still retained. At the same time he was keenly aware of the observation they were attracting, and drawing her hand through his arm, led her gently along the street.

Anna, on whom few external things were lost, observed that the women drew back with a sudden air of decent reserve, and that some of the men touched their caps to him; also that he seemed to recognise faces on all sides. He did not say much to her till they had entered the chapel enclosure.

It still wanted a few minutes to the hour of service; a few worshippers had already assembled—there were not likely to be many; and the priest was at that moment crossing over from his house, which closely adjoined the chapel.

He lived and laboured zealously in the midst of his unsavoury flock.

Philip, who had placed Anna within the shelter of the porch, stepped across to speak to him.

“I have Father Price’s permission to make use of the vestry for a few minutes, while you explain how it is I have found you here,” he said to her when he came back. “Please follow me.”

She followed him, as a matter of necessity, into the small whitewashed chamber, which held nothing beyond a table and chair, and an old oaken chest clamped with iron, which was the depository of the district registers. A dingy surplice hung from a nail in the wall, and a bottle of water and glass were set upon the table. The one redeeming point of beauty was an ivory crucifix of mediæval workmanship, which was suspended above the chest.

Philip placed the chair for her, and pouring some of the water into the glass, offered it to her to drink.

“You are right,” she said, accepting it eager-

ly, “I am worn out with excitement and fatigue. I have walked all the way from Skeffington Vicarage.”

“So I judged,—but why, Anna? I do not wish to hurry you, but I have not much time at my disposal. What has led you to do this thing?”

“What? cannot you suppose it is to worship as you worship? But no—I won’t deceive you—that was not my motive. On those subjects I feel just the same as ever—as my father taught me to feel. I came, because I could think of no other way of meeting you.”

“I am distressed,” he answered, “that you should have been driven to such an expedient, and that circumstances have made it impossible for me to come and see you. But I relied upon Mrs Sylvestre explaining her own objections, and I looked forward from time to time to the chance of meeting you at Earlescourt. For the rest, you know pretty well how my time is spent just now.”

“What do you mean about Mrs Sylvestre? Also—I have another wrong to put right—why

did you not meet me at the station when I came home? I thought it would have been enough for me to express a wish."

"It might have been enough," he answered, with an indefinable reserve of manner which irritated her to the highest point, "had my time been at my own disposal. I had occasion to see Mrs Sylvestre the same morning I received your letter, and I begged her to explain how impossible it was for me to do as you wished. My uncle was at that time very ill indeed. Her answer was, that under no circumstances would she have sanctioned such an arrangement, and she made it a personal request that I should not visit you at the vicarage. Is it possible she did not explain this?"

"She explained nothing," said Anna, in a low tone.

"Then it is very generous on your part to have forgiven what must have appeared to you such shameful neglect; and I am deeply grateful, Anna, though I could wish you had proved it at less cost to yourself."

He spoke with more warmth, and his eyes rested upon her with a sort of tender admiration.

“How beautiful you have grown, little Anna !” and he lifted her hand to his lips ; “and Honour and Oliver tell me how clever and accomplished as well ! You have proved the truth of what we once talked about—the wheels run more smoothly, and you are willing to own now that life is worth living ?”

“Yes,” she said, looking at him with eyes full of tears ; “I am willing to own it now.”

Her heart was full to overflow. The tones of his voice, the remembered individualities of his manner, the physical beauty which wrought at all times upon her sensuous temperament, swayed her with irresistible force. She could scarcely resist the impulse to cast herself upon his breast, or to sink at his feet sobbing out her passion and her joy ; but time and training had done something for her in the way of self-discipline, and also she did not feel secure one moment against interruption.

It was an unwelcome shock to her excited

sensibility when he said more coolly, “ Will you sit and rest here for a few minutes while I go into the chapel? Then we will get a carriage of some kind from the ‘ Bull’ to take you home.”

“ But you mean to come with me ? ”

“ No, that is out of the question. Mrs Sylvestre will regard your conduct, I hope, as a characteristic stroke of impulse ; or if you think I can do any good, I will try, if possible, to call at the vicarage before the day is over—there is a long day yet before us.”

He smiled, seemed to take her angry silence for consent, and opening the door which led into the chapel, went out.

Anna clasped her hands before her eyes.

Was this casual meeting — these guarded, kindly words — this infinite gulf of distance — to be the only outcome of her perilous freak ?

Oh, but he was priest-trained, and under bondage still ; she would not risk her future by too great precipitation. One thing, however, would be necessary : to restore her relations with Earlescourt, so as to obtain the oppor-

tunity of occasional intercourse with him. She would throw herself upon Honour's generosity, and ask if she was to be cut off from her love because she had not been able to love Adrian back again?

Philip returned, after a short interval, accompanied, to her angry displeasure, by the old priest, who greeted Anna with almost paternal kindness, and began to talk to her about the village of Skeffington, and the changes he had known in his time. After a few more minutes, the messenger who had been sent for the carriage came in to announce its arrival at the door of the chapel, and bringing with him at the same time a cup and frothing jug of new milk.

“Come, Anna,” said Philip, as he filled the cup and offered it to her, “this reminds me of the old days at Fiesole—you were never so content as when feeding me with goat’s milk.”

“Let me feed you now!” she said, eagerly. “I will not drink unless you share it with me.”

It was perhaps as well that in the rush of

memory his words excited, she had slipped back into the softness of the Tuscan tongue. She held out the cup her lips had tasted as she spoke ; but he put it down on the table beside him without responding to her tender challenge, and with a deliberate avoidance of the glance which he knew was fastened upon his face.

“ Let me put you in the carriage at once,” he said, with a smile which, in spite of its sweetness, had a suggestion of restraint in it ; “ it is quite time that both of us were at home.”

“ Will you not drive back too ? ” she asked, as she took her place.

“ I am not ready. I prefer to walk. *Addio, a riverderci !* ”

CHAPTER XX.

“ If thou must love me, let it be for nought
Except for love’s sake only, that evermore
Thou mayst love on through all eternity.”

—E. B. BROWNING.

“ Put out the lights and draw up the blinds, so that I can watch the dawn, and persuade myself the night is further spent than it is. I shall weary you all out! It frets me that I should make such a long business of dying.”

“ And I have not courage enough to face the idea of the time when that business will be done!”

“ Oh, that eases my mind! I have been thinking, as I lay awake, that no man could well be more solitary than you when I am dead. I don’t know of any man, woman, or child who can claim relationship with you. You must marry, Philip, and give me your promise that you will—it is in the bond.”

The young man was silent, and it was too dark to see his face.

“ It vexed me greatly,” pursued Sir Giles, “ that you made yourself the guest of the Abbé de Sève during that week in Paris. What better way could you have taken to put yourself in touch with the old denials ? To my thinking, it was treating me unfairly. I repeat, you stand pledged to maintain the race : you are twenty-eight years old, nephew.”

There was again a pause between them, and Philip perceived that Sir Giles had turned towards him as well as his weakness allowed, and was peering through the semi-darkness to see the effect of his words. He moved his chair close to the bedside, and took hold of the hand that was straying over the coverlet with the restlessness of pain and weakness.

“ I see that it will comfort you,” he said, with his habitual directness of speech, “ if I tell you that my reluctance to marry is a thing of the past—that is, if I am happy enough to persuade Honour Aylmer to be my wife.”

“ Honour Aylmer ! ” repeated the old baronet,

with a gasp of emotion. “Heaven is kinder to me than I deserve! You have lifted a load from my heart—Honour is not too good for you.”

“My prayer is that she may be willing to think so.”

“You will go and ask her the question to-morrow—that is, to-day—Philip! Tell her from me, a dying old man, that she must forego her privileges—that I must see your hands joined before I go. What should hinder it?”

His excitement was rising dangerously high; the consolation he had never expected to receive seemed suddenly close within his touch, and he was eager to grasp it.

“Promise,” he cried, sharply, “that there shall be no delays or reserves on your part, and that you will do all a lover can to overrule hers.”

“I promise,” said Philip; and there was something in the inflection of his voice which satisfied his uncle. He fell back on his pillows with a sigh of relief.

“Send Duncan to take your place, and go to

bed for an hour or two. Do not go to her heavy-eyed and pale. Yet—wait a minute!"

It was characteristic, that his morbid sensibility was quickly reasserting itself, and checked the full tide of his comfort.

"It is human nature, but I should hardly have thought it was yours, Philip, to have fallen in love in such a time as this. You have managed to indemnify yourself pretty well for the tedium of waiting on an old man's deathbed. I do not complain, but the fact strikes me."

"My love for Honour Aylmer is not the growth of the last month or two. I took it to India with me, and I still keep my secret. I don't mean to deny that we have never met or parted lately without a deeper conviction on my part that my happiness lay in her hands, —but this without any breach of loyalty to you."

"So be it," said the old man, still with impatience; "let it pass! Any way, now you have the satisfaction of knowing that your love and your loyalty run on the same lines. Don't

keep me in suspense an hour longer than necessary!"

There are perhaps few things more difficult than for a man to make deliberately an avowal of love; it seems to be of the essence of the passion that such disclosures should be accidental and spontaneous. Perhaps as Philip Methuen, later on the same morning, rode slowly towards Earlescourt with this purpose in view, he felt such awkwardness less than most men would have done. The long training of his youth had tended to chasten, almost to eliminate, the impulsive propensities, and to reduce every action of his life to some recognised law of conduct.

It would indeed need to be some terrible crisis of experience when either his words or actions escaped his own control, or hurried him into the vortex of self-abandonment; but it should be remembered that this mastery is never obtained by any man the bases of whose character are not deeply laid in strength of feeling as well as strength of will. Thus it followed that even his love for Honour should

be modified by the potent influences of his education, as well as by the bias of his nature: whether right or wrong, he held the opinion that even in legitimate forms of self-gratification there is, not perhaps positive unworthiness, but a descent from the highest plane of human conduct. To live to himself was so far from being an *allurement*, that it almost needed an effort to accept this charmed life which seemed opening before him,—not from coldness or lack of receptivity, but from the temper which instinctively disclaims the right to personal happiness.

“Soul, take thine ease!” he said to himself, half bitterly, would be the burden of the message the future bore him, if Honour’s sweet eyes answered the love in his; self-indulgence, self-delights, the highest sensual pleasures masking themselves as duties, instead of the relentless sacrifice of individual will and desire—the rigour of unshrinking subserviency to other men’s needs.

As he got off his horse and entered the house, he distinguished the sound of Oliver’s

piano under Honour's crisp and delicate touch. He was sufficiently at home to find his way to the room without introduction. Oliver was lying on the couch under the window, which stood open to the warm perfumed air. A magnolia-tree in blossom pushed its lustrous leaves close against the glass.

He looked flushed and worn, and the lines on his brow indicated not only some special pressure of pain and discomfort, but of intense impatience and resistance under it.

“Oh!” he cried, as Philip entered, “is it you? Leave off, Honour—Philip is better! I begin to hate Chopin as he does. Presently he shall sing to me.”

He made room for Methuen to sit beside him, and frowned and twisted with irritation when he saw him cross over to the piano to speak to Honour.

“Bear with him,” she said, in a low tone; “he has had one of his worst nights, and is worn out with pain. Your influence is greater than mine; how are we to give him strength to suffer?”

Her look and manner were that of one whose sympathy has been strained to the verge of endurance, and there was a pathetic droop in the lips, and a heaviness in the eyes she raised to his face, that suggested the idea to his mind that Oliver's sleepless night had not been endured alone. Pity and tenderness, and the instinctive worship of his soul for such unconscious virtue as hers, quickened his love almost to the point of pain ; it took the colour from his cheek and gave fire to his glance, but no more overt sign escaped him.

“I can stay with him for an hour,” he answered—and the sacrifice taxed him more heavily than he would have believed possible—“if you will rest meanwhile, and give me the opportunity of speaking to you before I leave the house.”

He dropped his eyes as he spoke ; he did not choose to read his sentence in advance. For a moment Honour’s heart stood still : the man who spoke to her was the ideal of all charm and excellence to her pure and exacting mind, and—there could not be much

mistake as to what his words and manner meant. It meant, that she should spend the given hour of rest in questioning her own worthiness to receive the great gift of his love.

When Methuen had closed the door after her, he turned back to Oliver, and was struck by the expression of his face—the suffering and bitterness were so intense. It had been in his mind to expostulate with him on his unmanly want of patience and consideration, but pity conquered every other feeling. “I see,” he said, “your pain is almost past bearing. What can I do? It seems a cruel mockery to say I wish I could bear it for you.”

“You!” cried Oliver, turning fiercely upon him—“you! What do you know of aches and pains? I am insulted by your pity! It is an infamy that one human being should be born into the world like you and another like me—a mark only for the contemptuous compassion one throws to a thrashed hound or over-driven horse! What was hard enough to bear as a boy, I find out is unbearable as a man. Do not stay here; go

where you wish to go—to Honour, who is waiting for you! Am I blind, do you think, as well as lame and crooked?"

"I grant," said Philip quietly, sitting down beside him in spite of his resistance, "that if you accept your hard fate in a spirit far meaner than that of a beaten hound, you lower yourself even beneath that level,—you to whom some of the highest chances of humanity have been offered."

The boy uttered a disdainful snort.

"It is nothing but a truism to tell you that the perfect equilibrium of body and mind, the energy of the strong, the success of those called great, even the happiness of happy lovers, count for nothing in the divine estimate; while one sigh of impatience checked, or sharp stroke of pain endured without betrayal, knits the soul to God."

Oliver glanced at him askance.

"I should hate you, Methuen, only—you believe what you say. The justice of God, then, puts martyrdom for my portion, and every good gift of body and mind, and all

the human bliss that goes with them, for yours ; and I am to accept it as an equitable arrangement ! ”

“ What true soldier resents the call to the front ? It is he who is placed in the rear, amongst the reserves which may never be wanted, who may well doubt his courage and merit.” Philip stopped short suddenly ; his teaching seemed to have a sharp personal application.

“ Pity you should not be able to change places with me ! ” said Oliver, in a tone of derision. “ If there is one thing to my mind more disgusting than another, it is to see the man who treads softly on rose-leaves indicating the red-hot ploughshares to the appointed victim, and bidding him take heart of grace. Martyrdom never commends itself to the martyr, depend upon it. I like the reserves ! ”

He leaned forward and peered into the other’s face, which he had turned away.

“ Why don’t you tell me you would have preferred my lot in life to yours ? ” he asked, with a sneer.

“Because I could not say it honestly ; the strength to submit and endure only comes with the necessity.”

He got up and went to the piano. “I will sing to you, if you like.”

“Ah, well, that will be a minor martyrdom,” said the boy, spitefully. “You shall sing till I am tired—only, if you have been sitting up all night, I am afraid you will not be in good voice, and I am critical, if nothing else.”

Philip accepted the challenge—his blood was on fire. Every pulse seemed to rebel against this forced suspense and quiescence ; but was he to prove unequal to this trifling test with his own brave words in his ears ?

Oliver did his best to make the test wellnigh intolerable. He interrupted and contradicted him continually—asking for what he knew he did not sing, and finding fault with what he did, with a mixed perversity and acuteness difficult to bear ; but Philip’s patience and coolness were invincible.

Oliver was first tired out—or rather a spirit like his, which hung upon musical expression

as upon a golden chain, lifting him out of the abyss of physical sensation, could not resist the spell of the exquisite voice, touched to the finest faculty of interpretation.

“Forgive me!” he said humbly, as Methuen for the third time reached the conclusion of a certain movement of Purcell’s, in which the boy had lost himself in rapture—“forgive me, and I will let you off. Come here a minute!”

Philip went close up to him, and saw that his eyes were full of tears.

“When you have taken Honour Aylmer away from me, Philip Methuen, what good shall my life do me?—and yet I cannot hate you.”

“If,” was the answer, “I am so happy as you seem to expect, I will never take her away from you: our home shall be yours. And now let me go and find her.”

But as he went down-stairs towards the garden, where he seemed to know by instinct she would be, Miss Earle interposed with friendly greetings and inquiries, and polite acknowledgments of his kindness to Oliver.

“We miss Adrian so much,” she said. “He

was always good to his brother, and lightened Honour's labours a little. You have not heard from him lately, I suppose ? ”

“ No, I have not heard from him. I thought he was at Kenmure with Sir Walter.”

“ Oh no, he has never been with his father at all ; he has gone off on some raid of his own.”

She looked at Philip curiously, wondering how much he knew of the situation, and if it was to his account that her nephew owed his recent disappointment, and the rest of the family their profound satisfaction.

“ You are not going, I hope ? Surely our forlorn condition will move you to pity, and you will be persuaded to stay to luncheon. Sir Giles, I judge from your looks, is better this morning ? ”

“ He is not better—it is a certain though slow decline—but he gave me leave of absence. No invalid could be less selfish.”

“ Then you are not in a hurry, and I will put a shawl over my shoulders and show you my rose-garden. We have quite a second harvest.”

Philip submitted with the grace of a courtier, and the practised patience which was seldom unequal to the demands made upon it; but Miss Earle was disappointed in her companion. Her impression was “that he knew something about roses,” as she expressed it, and recognised their importance in the scheme of the universe; but after he had miscalled “Maréchal Vaillant” for “Xavier Olibo,” and failed to perceive that he had never beheld so perfect a specimen of “Prince Camille de Rohan” before, her interest slackened, and she remembered she had letters to write.

“I think you will find Honour in the Nuttery,” she said. “It is a favourite retreat of hers, and if you can spare the time, a chat with you will do her good. Tell her I depend upon seeing you at luncheon.”

She nodded and turned away, and he was at last free to follow his bent.

The Nuttery was in a far-away corner of the grounds—a somewhat wild and neglected stretch of shrubbery with filbert-trees of so considerable an antiquity that they might well

have been mistaken for trees of the forest, and the more so that they had long ceased to bear fruit. It was a whim of Sir Walter Earle's not to have them cut down. On the right hand the space was marked out by a wall covered with mosses and lichens of exquisite gradations of golden colour, and with tiny hart's-tongue ferns peeping out from every chink of vantage.

A straight grass-covered path, soft as velvet, and with its verdant pile almost as closely cut, led to a wide rustic bench covered with an awning, on which Philip could perceive that Honour was seated. Above shone the blue-grey August sky, palpitating with light and heat.

Honour rose instinctively as Philip drew near.

“Don't let my coming disturb you,” he said. “Sit down again, Honour; with your leave I should like to talk to you here.”

His eyes dwelt upon her with a tenderness not to be mistaken; but for a few minutes he did not speak.

“You wore a white gown like this and a sash of the same colour the first time I saw you—do

you remember? Ever since I have judged all women's costumes by that."

"I remember perfectly. You read aloud that passage from Dante beginning 'Li ruscelletti, che de' verdi colli;' you condemned Chopin, criticised my painting, and took Oliver's liking by storm."

"Does your memory also recall that I stopped at that time a whole month at Earlescourt? That month was to me a new revelation. It was very soon after I left Paris, and was my first experience of family home life. I had never lived under the same roof with any woman before (except my mother), and was quite ignorant of the danger I ran. Honour, forgive me if I seem to speak too abruptly. I have no knowledge how other lovers plead; but you set before me in your sweet unconscious daily life the qualities I had been taught to reverence and adore from a child, in such a fashion that I could not at first distinguish between my religion and my love."

He paused a moment, but she did not speak. Her inward answer was, "What am I, to be held thus worthy?" He went on—

“ When I discovered what had happened to me, it was to know that I was guilty, if not of a crime, at least of a shameful weakness. I went to India to try and forget the betrothed wife of Adrian Earle.”

Then she looked up at him with a smile touching her lips, and all the light of a woman’s tenderness shining in her eyes.

“ You are not going to tell me that you succeeded ? ” she asked.

“ I succeeded so far,” he answered, “ that even now at this moment, if he or any other man could make you happier than I, my acquiescence would be absolute. I have been content to forego you, Honour—what stronger proof of love can I give ? ”

He had taken her hands in his. The inflections of his voice, to which she had been keenly susceptible from the first hour that they met, and the proud humility of his manner, so wrought upon her that it was difficult not to make her response too swift and eager. She turned away her face as she answered—

“ I am afraid ! Your notions are so high—

you are so different from other men. You think me so much better than I am, and will be disappointed when you discover your mistake."

"Ah, I need to retaliate all that; but it is not to the point. I love you, Honour, once and for ever. Come what may in life, no other love will touch me. Can you love me back? I will worship you next to God!"

"Can I?" she replied, involuntarily tightening her clasp upon the hands which held hers. "I believe I have always loved you, Philip; just as Anna Trevelyan opened Adrian's eyes to the knowledge of his mistake, so, though I did not know it at the time, did you open mine. But, I repeat, I am afraid of my great happiness."

"Trust me," he said; "I will not deceive you. Outside my duty to God, I am yours body and soul, flesh and spirit, as long as I draw the breath of life or can discern the evil from the good."

He drew her into his arms, and their lips met, not with the intemperate heat of passion, which exhausts the honey of union as the bee

the flower, but with the nobler reticence of the highest love, which by a divine paradox attracts while it withholds.

Before Philip left Honour that morning (he did not accept Miss Earle's invitation to luncheon), he had won from her the promise that she would come and see Sir Giles Methuen on the next, knowing how it would cheer and gladden the sick man to see her and hear her himself. He had as yet said nothing about his uncle's anxiety for an immediate marriage, for there seemed to him something almost sacrilegious in such haste. Perhaps he was scarcely anxious to forego the finer rapture and more spiritual delight of the lover for the assured content of marriage, or he was reluctant to startle Honour too suddenly from the tender contemplation of her rose of joy.

It was also agreed upon between them that though it was necessary to ask at once Miss Earle's approval and consent, they should keep their golden secret a little longer from public disclosure, Oliver being made the only exception.

CHAPTER XXI.

“The darkness of death is like the evening twilight ; it makes all objects appear more lovely to the dying.”—RICHTER.

How at every turn in the road of life men have to reconcile themselves to renewed and irremediable disappointment !

When Honour Aylmer, accompanied by Miss Earle, arrived late in the afternoon of the next day at Methuen Place, Mrs Gibson met them with red eyes and speech scarcely under command.

Sir Giles was adored by all his dependants, to the surprise of some of his friends ; but where large-hearted generosity exists in conjunction with rigid requirements as to essentials, and indulgence towards details, added to quick discernment of fidelity or the reverse, servants are sure to be loyal in spite of flaws in the master’s

temper. There is nothing that less wins their favour than a slack, uncertain, unobservant rule.

She told them, as well as she was able, that Sir Giles had been sinking rapidly during the last twenty-four hours, and that the symptoms now present were those which they had been warned would precede dissolution. He had become suddenly worse soon after Mr Methuen had left the house the day before, and was almost speechless on his return. Since then he had rallied a little, and had insisted on having his old servants summoned to his bedside to bid them farewell, and was now in the very act of receiving the last offices of the Church, both Fathers Price and Francis being in attendance.

She added, "he was in a heavenly frame of mind"—a statement which drew a doubtful smile from Miss Earle's stanch Protestantism, and a sigh of indefinable desire from Honour.

The two ladies exchanged looks of hesitation and sympathy, and then the elder said—

"I think, if you see no objection, we should like to wait a little while, in case of change or

improvement in poor Sir Giles ; no one need know that we are here."

The housekeeper showed them into a sitting-room, and lingered a little longer at Miss Earle's request.

"Mr Methuen, no doubt, feels it very deeply ?" she asked ; "he will be left very much alone in the world."

"It would be a strange thing if Mr Methuen did not feel it," was Mrs Gibson's almost indignant rejoinder, "for Sir Giles took to him from the first more like a father than anything else. The thing he feels most now is parting from him ; it would go to any one's heart to see the way he lies in bed and watches him, and his voice has a different sound when he speaks to him after another. But there, what can you expect ? Who could help loving Mr Methuen out of the common ? There isn't a stable-boy about the place who doesn't do the best he knows to please him ; and if Sir Giles has treated him like a father, no son could have gone beyond him in duty."

"I agree," said Miss Earle, briskly ; "very

few young men watch month after month in a father's sick-room as Mr Methuen has done. He must be very much worn out."

" You would think so, but he doesn't show it. Some people have a way of soon knocking themselves up with nursing and calling out for pity instead of the patient, just because they neglect all reasonable ways of taking care of their health. Now, Mr Methuen goes out for a good walk every day, and takes his meals regular ; but for all that, there are not many hours in the twenty-four when he is out of Sir Giles's room, and that's hard upon a young man when all's said and done."

At this moment a bell rang from the upper portion of the house. Mrs Gibson turned a little pale.

" It's the dear master's bell," she said. " Excuse me a few minutes, ladies."

" Only," said Honour, catching her hand, " come back and tell us, or send."

They waited a few moments in painful suspense ; at least it was acutely painful to Honour. Miss Earle could not help letting her eye wander

over the furniture of the room in which they were sitting, and speculating upon the radical changes that would be necessary before Methuen Place could be made ready for its new mistress. She condemned herself for the involuntary callousness, but could not feel any profound emotion at the passing away of a feeble, querulous old man, who had no ties upon her regard.

Then the door unexpectedly opened, and Philip himself entered.

His face was so pale, and his manner so intensely quiet and controlled, that Miss Earle felt a little startled.

“I am sure,” he said, addressing her first, “you will excuse all ceremony. My uncle is dying; he knows you are here, and he has asked to see Honour. Have I your permission to take her to him?” Then he added quickly, “You know what that consent means?”

“Take her—if you will,” was Miss Earle’s answer, and her voice was scarcely under her control.

“Come, Honour!” he said, and he took her hand and led her out of the room.

The sick man, over whose eyes the films of death were already gathering, looked eagerly towards the door as it opened. Mrs Gibson was sobbing at the foot of the bed, and the two priests knelt one on either side.

“Leave us for a few moments alone,” said Philip, addressing the elder of the two; “I will summon you again immediately.”

Father Price retired at once, not without a kindly glance at the tall beautiful girl whose hand Philip still retained, but the other (the same who had slept at his watch over poor Mark Methuen’s remains) made some slight protest.

“Suffer it to be so now,” urged Philip, with an anxious glance towards the bed—“let the responsibility rest with me.”

“The responsibility of calling back a parting soul fresh from the consecration of his Maker is a heavy one, my son, and not to be lightly assumed,” said the old priest, in a tone as devoid of sensibility as sounding brass; but he could not resist the decision of the young man’s manner, and reluctantly followed his brother into the ante-room.

Philip led Honour up to Sir Giles Methuen's right hand, and the girl sank reverently on her knees beside the bed, and fixed her tender suffused eyes upon the ashen face.

"I am here," she said, in low tones of exquisite pathos—"give me your blessing."

Sir Giles with a concentrated effort fixed his failing eyes on her sweet face, and a faint smile trembled on his lips.

Philip, anticipating the purpose he had no strength to express, knelt beside Honour, and taking her hand in his, put it solemnly against his lips.

"We are pledged to each other for life or death," he said, "and it will soften our sorrow to know that you are satisfied."

Sir Giles succeeded in raising his hand and putting it on the clasped hands of the pair kneeling beside him. Then a few words ebbed slowly from his lips.

"Be good to him, my dear," speaking to Honour, "and pay him back for me."

His eyes wandered to his nephew, and a sudden spasm passed over his face. Human heart-

strings of necessity break and let go, but they bleed under the process, and there was a look of such poignant anguish in the gaze that met his, that it added a bitter sweetness to the final pangs.

His lips moved again, but utterance was over; and had it been otherwise, no words could have been adequate to express the yearning love and wistful hope which were the last conscious movements of the old man's spirit on this side the undiscovered country.

CHAPTER XXII.

“Now, by heaven,
My blood begins my safer guides to rule,
And passion having my best judgment choler'd,
Assays to lead the way.”

—SHAKSPEARE.

It was a subject of some surprise and general remark that the death of Sir Giles Methuen seemed to be so profoundly mourned by his nephew. Not that there was any demonstrativeness in Philip's grief: it had the depth, sincerity, and strength which were the elements of his character.

For the six weeks following the funeral he shut himself up in the grey old Place, making it to be distinctly understood that he neither visited nor received visits. It was a foreign custom by no means acceptable to English notions, and Miss Earle's dissatisfaction almost

approached resentment, for no exception was made in favour of Earlescourt.

“ You are satisfied with your lover, Honour ? ” she asked, drily. “ He is certainly not made for working days.”

“ I am quite satisfied,” she answered, and her sweet face had that marvellous radiance with which happy love transfigures the countenances of some women. “ He writes to me every day.”

Miss Earle shrugged her shoulders. “ Let us be thankful for small mercies ! I feel bound to warn you, dear Honour, against taking too obviously the attitude of worshipper ; it is a temptation which corrupts even the virtue of an archangel, and I suppose that Sir Philip Methuen himself does not stand higher than that. Somehow my mind misgives me—I have always held paragons in fear.”

“ You mean—that you do not trust Philip ? ” Honour smiled with a superb assurance.

“ Not exactly that ; but I can hardly believe that we can have a commonplace wedding, a refurbishing of tarnished splendours, and prosaic bliss afterwards, when he is the hero ! You

know the Methuen motto and legend—‘Fides non felicitas’—and that ill-luck is the inheritance of every heir to the title? But forgive me, darling, I am only jesting in order to keep your ideal expectations within reasonable bounds.”

It was true that Honour was looking both grave and pale.

“I cannot conceive what could come between us but death,” she said. “Together there would be nothing to fear.”

“And that ‘together’ will not be very long delayed, sweet,” kissing her tenderly. “I admire the common-sense of poor Sir Giles, who laid that injunction on his nephew; and at bottom, perhaps, I admire the self-denial of the nephew himself. Let us say that he loves you, dear, almost as well as you deserve.”

The singular seclusion observed by the new baronet was equally a subject of discussion at Skeffington Vicarage. It would have been a matter of astonishment to any one unacquainted with the craving hunger after personal details which seems the normal condition of country

society, and is only to be paralleled by the mysterious sagacity with which it scents them out, how every movement of young Methuen was watched and known. How often the family solicitors visited him — whether Mr Chapman stayed all night or otherwise—every occasion when the old priest at Crawford was his guest, or he walked himself to the chapel for early celebration,—were circumstances as well known to his neighbours as himself.

Anna Trevelyan, from the time when she came almost as a child to the vicarage, had been in the habit of bribing her aunt's house-maid, Janet, for news of the doings at Methuen Place, increasing her bribes with the difficulty or necessity of obtaining it. The fact of the girl having a brother in the stables of the house established a natural line of communication, and was prized by Anna as an inestimable piece of good fortune. In this way she was kept pretty well informed of his visits to Earlescourt, and had even known of that paid by Miss Earle and Honour to Sir Giles Methuen on the day of his death.

This circumstance quickened to an almost intolerable degree the latent jealousy and misgiving she had always entertained in respect to Honour Aylmer, and she began again eagerly to revolve schemes for placing herself in direct communication with Philip. The obstacle which had stood between their intercourse was surely now removed by the death of the selfish old man (there are none so keen to detect selfishness as those whose motive-power it is), who had monopolised the time and affection of his nephew. What was there now to prevent the recognition and fulfilment of the contract which, she never ceased to try and persuade herself, dated back to her childhood?—his excessive scruples about visiting at a house where he had been forbidden? the failure of his expectation of meeting her at Earlescourt to which he had referred? his exaggerated respect for his uncle's memory, and monkish way of showing it?

She never concealed from herself that her regard for Philip Methuen was a much more active and powerful sentiment than his for her, and that it would be part of the function of

her love to kindle the flame of passion from her own torch ; but she accepted the necessity as the natural outcome of his priestly training, and the prospect of breaking down the barriers of his coldness and reserve rather stimulated her imagination than otherwise.

But this was only so long as he was equally indifferent to all other women : the notion of his feeling any attraction towards Honour Aylmer beyond the moral complacency he had often expressed, and which moved Anna's unmitigated contempt, worked so powerfully against her peace of mind that the routine of her aunt's household became daily a burden heavier to bear.

The one mitigating circumstance was the seclusion which Philip thought proper to observe, and which, she had kept herself informed, was not violated by any intercourse with the Earlescourt family.

Anna had succeeded in keeping her visit to the Roman Catholic chapel a secret from her aunt. On the day in question she had dismissed her carriage at a discreet distance from

the vicarage, and had then walked quietly into Mrs Sylvestre's presence with the announcement that she had been taking a walk before breakfast in hopes of getting rid of a headache, which, she added, "is so bad that I shall never be able to boast immunity again."

So well had her diplomacy succeeded, that she had thought it better to get a note conveyed to Methuen Place, through the usual channel of communication, telling Philip not to come to the vicarage as he had promised, the matter being arranged without his interference.

Such was the condition of affairs about five weeks after the death of Sir Giles, when the vicar, coming in as usual one afternoon from his parish rounds, said, as he took his place at the tea-table, invariably spread and surrounded at the same hour—

"I forgot to mention that I met Mrs Gibson in the park yesterday—a very worthy creature, my dear, is Mrs Gibson—and learnt some news of the new baronet."

Mrs Sylvestre instinctively bridled : the commendation of the stanch old papist house-

keeper would certainly have been met by protest or disclaimer, only she was not unwilling to hear what had been communicated, and deemed interruption unseasonable.

“ You will be surprised to hear,” pursued Mr Sylvestre, examining with some natural disappointment the contents of an almost exhausted tin of sardines, “ that Mrs Gibson has been in town for the last ten days engaged in choosing and furnishing some bachelor chambers for Sir Philip Methuen.”

“ I am not in the least surprised,” interrupted Mrs Sylvestre, severely ; “ I am quite prepared to see the young man indemnify himself for the unnatural restrictions of his youth by running a course of profligate self-indulgence in the future. It is simply the effect of a cause ; and, I ask, what is there to restrain him in a religion formulated to accommodate itself to the worst weaknesses of human nature ? ”

“ I don’t think, my dear,” replied the vicar, a little drily, “ that the young man in question will draw very heavily on his spiritual privileges. It appears that Lord Sainsbury is

expected home in wretched health, which of course we already knew from the newspapers, and has telegraphed to young Methuen to meet him in town. There is some press-work to be got out of hand which was intrusted to him when he left India, and must see the light before Parliament meets. Let us hope that this will help to keep him out of mischief."

"In that case it would have been more reasonable for Philip Methuen to take up his abode under Lord Sainsbury's own roof."

Mrs Sylvestre spoke with that air of finality which is never more influential than when we are arranging our neighbours' affairs.

"Lord Sainsbury only stops in town a few days, and then goes on at once to some warmer climate. His town house is not open; he will go to Claridge's, but Methuen prefers a domicile of his own. His work will keep him in town some time, it appears—not a cheerful prospect at this time of the year."

It was Anna's policy never to betray the interest she felt in this subject to her aunt. The news she had just heard was absolutely unac-

ceptable, baffling her plans, and rendering her course of conduct more difficult than ever ; but she ate her dry toast, and sipped her milk (which was the diet she preferred), with her habitual air of indifference to whatever subject was under discussion.

Inwardly she blessed the minuteness of her aunt's curiosity when Mrs Sylvestre asked—

“ And where are Philip Methuen's apartments ? ”

“ In Bruton Street, I think she said, and that he was going up to town in a day or two. One thing is certain, he will not be much missed ! It can never be sufficiently deplored that Skeffington parish is in the hands of a Catholic proprietor. I hear it reported that the new baronet means to restore the home chapel at the Place, and bring over a chaplain from some foreign seminary ; but I trust his friends at Earlescourt will advise him against doing anything so unpopular.”

“ His friends at Earlescourt or elsewhere will never influence Philip Methuen much,” replied Mrs Sylvestre with a sneer ; and then she added,

moved by the association of ideas, “I cannot understand, Anna, how it is that the Earle family have seemingly dropped your acquaintance since you returned from town—there is more in it, I begin to suspect, than you choose to explain.”

In spite of herself Anna felt the hot blood rise in her cheeks, and was aware that every one at the table looked at her. Mrs Sylvestre compressed her thin lips with an ominous change of countenance, and began to talk laboriously of something else ; but when the meal was over, she called Anna into the drawing-room—a room rarely used when the family were alone, but always made the scene of important discussion or of the administration of parental law.

“I have sent for you,” she said, “to ask you once more—as I have often asked you before, only this time I mean to have an answer—the reason why you cut short your visit to the Earles in London, and of their casting you off since their return ?”

She spoke with the quiet incisiveness which, as Anna expressed it, meant mischief ; and the

girl was quick to perceive that another occasion had arisen for a mutual trial of strength. Would it suit her purpose best to defy her aunt or to yield ?

“ I was tired of them,” she answered sullenly ; “ I wanted to come home.”

“ You are not apt to be soon tired of a life of luxurious indolence, and of opportunities for the indulgence of your love of pleasure and personal display ; your excuses lack ingenuity, Anna. Try again !”

The sneer wrought upon Anna. Her eyes flashed.

“ Have the truth if you will,” she said with a gesture of defiance ; “ I came home because Adrian Earle made love to me.”

Daring as she was, she felt startled by the change in her aunt’s face ; the colour ebbed from cheek and lips, and a cold gleam of sinister meaning came into her eyes. She looked as if she had received a blow ; and it was true that she had—one, the force of which she was only able to estimate by degrees.

“ Do you mean,” she asked, in a low sup-

pressed voice, "that Adrian Earle made you an offer of marriage ?"

"What else could I mean ? To what other end was he likely to make love to me ?"

"And you refused him ?"

"I refused him," repeated Anna.

There was a pause. It would be hard to convey the idea of the rage and disappointment in Mrs Sylvestre's mind. Here had been a solution of the problem as to the final disposal of her niece, beyond her wildest expectations and desires ; so much indeed beyond the latter and the girl's deserts, that it would have been thoroughly obnoxious to her except for the incalculable advantages such a position would have won for her own children ; and Anna, with a perverseness beyond calculation, prompted by an almost inconceivable malice, had thrown her chance away !

"And this is why you came home ? You complain of your life here, and the burden of poverty and dependence, and you had the offer of becoming mistress of Earlescourt, and—refused it ! I do not believe you."

Anna shrugged her shoulders with an air of ineffable indifference. In Mrs Sylvestre's mood of irritation it was more than she could bear ; her accustomed self-control escaped her, and she grasped the girl's arm with passionate violence.

“Or if,” she resumed in a hissing whisper, “if it be true, there is some shameful explanation of the fact. What is it ? You would not be Lewis Trevelyan's daughter if, sooner or later, you failed to disgrace the name !”

Anna wrenched herself away from her aunt's grasp with a face white and distorted with anger. Mrs Sylvestre had put her finger on the most sensitive spot in the girl's heart : her whole being was in revolt.

“Mother of God !” she cried, and she raised her hand as if in invocation, while her face flamed with the white heat of her passion,—“I will never forgive you ! If I live for ever and ever, I will never forgive you !” And she turned and fled from the room.

Where should she go ? What should she do ? She was beside herself with rage and indignation—the insult to her father's memory scorched

her brain like fire. Oh that she had some friend at hand who would receive her, so that she might never taste the ignominy of sleeping or breaking bread under that miserable roof again !

And then came another turn of thought. Had she not a friend ?—the man who had stood by her dead father's side, and renewed in that awful presence the pledges he had so often given before ? Who had said, “ My child, I love you dearly—love me a little ! I will take care of you as long as I live.”

He was not yet gone to London. She could go to him, and tell him the hour was come beyond postponement when he must make good his words. His days of forced mourning were over ; it remained for her to bring back warmth and joy into his desolation.

This was the first impulse of her mood of outrage and excitement, but as her passion exhausted itself, certain whispers of prudence and common-sense made themselves heard. It was now the middle of October, and daylight was already gone ; there were neither moon nor

stars, and the wind was rising. How could she, alone and at such an hour, demand admission at Methuen Place of the sleek, self-important, inquisitive servants who must answer her summons at the door? There were no means at this season of the year of stealing admission into the house as she had done before. Moreover, might not Mrs Sylvestre, finding she had escaped in her desperation, follow her to the one only asylum where her desperation could take refuge?

No; if she were wise, and would succeed in compassing the end she had in view, she must delay her appeal to Philip Methuen till the next day: it would be easy to make it appear she was the bearer of some message from the vicarage; or, in the wholesome light of day, what necessity to consider appearances at all? She should at once pass that and all other anxieties into his hands.

For the remainder of the evening she kept her room, and was allowed to keep it—a circumstance which Anna readily translated into a proof that Mrs Sylvestre recognised and pro-

bably regretted her intemperance, which conclusion increased her contempt without softening her resentment. She appeared, as a matter of precaution, at the breakfast-table the next morning, pale, sullen, and taciturn ; but this behaviour also appeared to be condoned—her aunt at least, whom she avoided looking at, making no comment.

Mr Sylvestre looked somewhat sharply towards her, his wife's tolerance naturally reducing his own.

“What is wrong with Anna this morning ?” he asked. “She looks as if she had not slept all night, or had got out of bed on the wrong side this morning.”

These homely phrases transported Anna with mingled disdain and indignation ; her lip curled, her sensitive nostril dilated, and she straightened her neck with an air of imperial scorn. The vicar's eyes lingered upon the picture almost involuntarily.

“What a splendid creature it is !” he said to himself. “I devoutly wish she were safe in some good man's keeping !”

After breakfast Anna again retired to her room, meaning to take the first opportunity of escaping unobserved from the house; but circumstances helped her scheme. She had not been long there when Dorothy came in.

"Mamma wants me to take a message to Mrs Mitchel at once," she said. "It's a little vexing! I have not got that new chant perfect, and meant to practise it this morning."

"What is the message?" asked Anna indifferently. "Is there any answer wanted?"

"No; only to say mamma is willing to give Mr Mitchel ten shillings for the silver-spangled Hambro' cock. She objected at first, as being too much. I think it *is* too much."

"I will go," said Anna. "The vicar is right. I look fit for nothing this morning; a walk will do me good."

A quarter of an hour later she was walking leisurely across the vicarage garden; leisurely through the long straggling village, where every eye that fell upon her knew her, till she reached the gate that led into Methuen Park. During this period of forced repression her excitement

was growing fast, so fast that she refused to stop and answer the questions which pressed on heart and brain.

What was she doing?—what should she say when she and Philip Methuen stood face to face? She would not give ear even for a moment to the rising whispers of womanly pride and modesty; she turned scornfully upon her struggling shames and hesitations, as pusillanimous and out of place. What should she say?—would speech be needful?—would not her first glance challenge his manhood and quicken the slow blood in his veins?—would not a hint be enough to make him understand that she appealed to him in this extremity as her pledged knight?—that she had flung off the protection of her aunt, whose cruelty had culminated in that last brutal insult, on the strength of her belief that a dearer and more secure asylum awaited her so soon as she saw fit to claim it?—Still, was not the fact that she needed to reassure herself after this fashion a proof of the extremity of her situation?

Anna stood still for a moment, and leaned

against the trunk of one of the huge elm-trees. Since she had entered the park she had walked so rapidly as to be already out of breath, and the conflict of her mind was still more exhausting. She drew a deep breath, and tried to settle and order her mind.

It was a lowering, chilly, autumnal day : the gorgeous splendour of the kindled foliage had already faded, the crimson and gold had changed into sickly orange and brown, and the leaves, saturated with moisture, hung limp and dishevelled from the boughs. The occasional caw of a rook from one of the more distant plantations was the only sound which broke the dull silence of the thick oppressive atmosphere : the stream flowed so sluggishly, she could scarcely detect the movement of the water, and its pleasant tinkle was dumb. The only figure in view was that of a boy threading the public road which crossed the park, with a heavy basket of bread upon his back, under which he seemed to labour and groan, shifting the burden continually from one shoulder to another. The girl was conscious of a feeling of impatient dis-

gust as she marked his uncouth face and figure, and ungainly gait.

She could distinguish the chimneys of the house where she stood, and observed how little a way the smoke rose in the heavy air. She moved slowly a few paces nearer, and the old grey mansion lay at her feet, dumb, too, as it seemed to her. Every window was closed, and the blinds drawn in all the principal rooms facing the gardens.

A feeling of sickening disappointment, or rather of blind impotent fury as against some fate that mocked her, put new life into her limbs. A few moments more she had pulled the bell at the heavy gateway, and heard the sound reverberating through the house. An interval elapsed, brief indeed, but almost intolerable to her impatience, before the door was somewhat slowly opened, and Austin, the old butler, faced her in the wide issue.

“Is Sir Philip Methuen at home? I have a message from my uncle, the vicar of Skeffington.”

Whatever the inward sinking of her heart,

her bearing was as stately and defiant as usual, and her beauty of that rare and perfect type which carries its message to high and low alike ; also, as a matter of necessity, the man was personally acquainted with her.

“I am very sorry, Miss. Sir Philip started for town about half an hour ago ; but perhaps you will come in and speak to Mrs Gibson ?”

Anna walked into the house like one in a dream, and sat down on the first chair that offered in the room into which Austin showed her. Her feelings seemed for a time in a state of collapse. Gone ! It did not in the least appear to her what she could do next, only instinct told her she must not let the keen-witted old housekeeper guess at her state of mind.

When Mrs Gibson came in, stiff and reserved as her manner was to strangers, and especially so to any member of the Sylvestre family, to say nothing of her quick sense of the obvious breach of propriety the vicar of Skeffington was committing in making his beautiful niece his

messenger to the young master of the house, Anna rose from her seat resolute and on guard. The expression of the good woman's face was at once a challenge and a warning.

“Sir Philip Methuen is gone to town already, I hear,” she said with perfect aplomb. “That is a pity! My uncle had an important commission he thought he would be good enough to undertake. I am a good walker, Mrs Gibson, and offered to bring the message myself.”

“It is a written message of course, Miss Trevelyan? In that case, I can enclose it by to-day's post to the master.”

For a moment Anna felt herself at fault; but in proportion to the inward difficulty was the steadfastness of the watch she kept on Mrs Gibson's face.

“Oh no, it was not written!” she answered. “It was about some book the vicar wanted, and I was quite able to explain. You seem to forget that I have known your master ever since I was a tiny child: he taught me to read!”

“He is not at home, at all events, Miss

Trevelyan," replied Mrs Gibson, without any relenting of the lines of her face. Mr Sylvestre must ask his favour by letter. I see no objection to giving you Sir Philip Methuen's address."

She turned aside to a writing-table as she spoke, so that the sudden change in Anna's face was lost upon her—a change arising from the swift perception that to obtain his precise address was to place a new weapon in her hands.

As Mrs Gibson handed her the slip of paper, she added, with an air of evident reluctance—"I do not know whether Mr Sylvestre may think his business important enough to take him to Trichester on the chance of meeting Sir Philip; he does not go up to town till the afternoon express."

Perhaps few greater triumphs of self-control have been gained than was won by Anna Trevelyan on receiving this information without betrayal; that the pallor of her skin flushed a little, and the light in her eyes concentrated and darkened, were signs too delicate to be

read by Mrs Gibson, who had just removed her spectacles after having accomplished her little effort at penmanship.

“I will tell my uncle what you say,” she answered,—and there was a metallic ring in the habitually deep, melodious voice,—“and he will of course do as he thinks proper. No, thank you, I don’t require any refreshment.”

A few minutes more and she was in the open air again, free to breathe, and think, and plan, with the quiet unheeding sky above, and the unbroken solitude of the park all around. She walked away from the house mechanically, and in the homeward direction—for might not there be curious eyes watching her?—but when she had reached a certain turn in the path where she knew herself to be beyond observation, she stood still, took off the hat which weighed on her forehead, and passed her hand over her eyes and brow, as if to wipe away the sensations which oppressed her.

She was in that mood of mind when the human heart cries upon God: upon the Power around and outside us, to help the reason that

is consciously tottering, and scatter the darkness which, if left to thicken, means despair.

She knew as well as if she had seen him, that the man in whom her passionate life was bound up was at Earlescourt, unable to leave home without bidding Honour Aylmer farewell, and —she could not bear it!

So much was it true that she could not bear it, that her mind, with the instinct of self-preservation, instantly seized upon alleviations of the idea. They at Earlescourt were his neighbours and best friends, and courtesy required that he should take leave of them. His kindness to Oliver Earle was of the kind he showed to all stricken and miserable creatures, and would be sure to lead him to go and see the youth before he went away. Sir Walter and Adrian might have suddenly returned. As for Honour, did she not know that his regard for her was of the sedate ethical kind which might mean friendship, but not love? No, not love!

And at that very moment the man and girl of whom she was thinking were standing together, hand locked in hand, her head upon his

shoulder, his kisses upon her lips, and only no speech between them, because love has a finer medium of interpretation, and defies words to bear the burden of its joy.

“Come into the garden,” he had said to her; “I can bear it better in the open air!”

Bear it?—the rapture of reunion, the pain of parting, brief as it was to be. “A week hence I shall be home again, Honour, to ask you formally of Sir Walter Earle, and announce our engagement, and then”—his face kindled as he bent over her—“sweet, you will remember I have loved you for years with every breath I drew, and that my dear uncle’s pain in death was lessened by his belief in your goodness. How soon will you consent to come to me?”

But this was what Anna could not see or hear even in the hush of the solemn autumnal morning. Would it have made any difference had she been able?

There was one way still open: she could avail herself of the chance of meeting him at the station. She cared nothing for consequences if

her scheme miscarried, and if it succeeded, the care of the future would lie with him.

Eight miles divided her from the county town; but she was vigorous enough to think lightly of the distance, and to walk there would help to pass the tedious hours away, besides the difficulty of finding any other way of getting to Trichester. Vehicles had to be hired from Crawford or Trichester itself, and were not to be picked up at any intermediate point.

So Anna retraced her steps through the park, though at the farthest practicable distance from the house, and set her face steadily to her purpose.

On consulting her watch, she found she had no time to lose. It was then nearly twelve o'clock, and the express was timed to leave Trichester at three.

The road was an uninteresting beaten highway, without a single point of interest to her; the free expanse of downs on either hand looked dreary enough under the brooding skies, and at no time commended themselves to the warm Italian instincts of the girl. She was much

more fatigued than she expected to be when she at length entered the town, and saw by the huge clock of the parish church that only twenty minutes remained before the departure of the train.

She had always been accustomed to look upon Trichester as dead and lifeless to the last degree; but to-day it seemed to her strangely full of stir and bustle, and that every passer-by looked at her in spite of the effort she made to assume a brisk and business-like demeanour. She made her way at once to the station, where, to her vexation, she perceived the station-master already on the watch for the express. He recognised her and touched his cap. The refreshment-room was on a very meagre scale at Trichester; yet it could at any rate have furnished Anna with a glass of milk and a biscuit, of which she stood sorely in need, but she durst not ask for them for fear of attracting attention and remark.

“I am waiting to see a friend off to town,” she explained haughtily enough to the station-master, whose silent observation as he passed her was becoming unbearable. Indeed she felt

increasingly that the whole situation was becoming unbearable. The hands of the clock pointed to five minutes of the hour. A fair sprinkling of passengers had already gathered on the platform, where each was in full view of the other.

What chance of speaking to Philip Methuen in a few breathless seconds, before the impertinent observation of outsiders? Would he not be astonished and displeased at the step she had taken? Was it not imperative to secure privacy enough for explanation before she ventured to show herself to him? How could this be done now? Still less, how could she go back to her shame and her misery without doing it? What explanation of her protracted absence could she give that would satisfy Mrs Sylvestre's vigilance?

The train was sharply signalled; the commotion quickened a little.

“Hold hard, Bill!” cried one of the porters. “There’s one of the Earlescourt carriages coming along like mad. It will take all they know to catch the train!”

Anna looked, and read the explanation at a glance. He had lingered too long over his adieux, and taken the Earles' carriage, because their horses were better than his own. Was she, after all, deceiving her own soul? or was it rather in his mind to deceive her? Her blood tingled in her veins. Was she of the temper to submit to treachery without protest? to stand aside, superseded, without a struggle for her rights? Come what might, she would put his honour to the question.

Her hand shook as she opened her purse. She had money enough for her ticket to town, but not much over.

“Open the carriage door, and get me my ticket,” she said to a porter standing close by her side.

“Where for, Miss?” asked the man, touching his cap.

“Waterloo,” whispered the girl, shrinking back into a corner of the carriage with bated courage and failing strength, for she had scarcely eaten anything that day, and dreaded nothing so much as that any eye should recognise her.

At the moment the man placed her ticket in her hand, she saw Philip come on the platform. He was walking rapidly towards the already opened carriage, with the Earlescourt footman following with his portmanteau, and the little station-master trotting almost obsequiously beside him, and laughing at his success in catching the train. He was dressed in deep mourning, but there was no mourning in his face. He looked in full vigour of body and mind, assured master of himself at all points, and of the blessedness which warmed his heart and touched his lips with a new sweetness, and his eyes with a direct and masculine light.

To the girl who watched him furtively, he looked like the beautiful youth who had played about with her at the old farm at Fiesole—the pledged friend of her girlhood and the redresser of her wrongs—the man whom no other woman should take from her.

CHAPTER XXIII.

“ And she said,
Not to be with you, not to see your face—
Alas for me then, my good days are done ! ”

—TENNYSON.

BEFORE they had reached Salisbury the rain fell in torrents. This was the first pause on the line; and at this point Anna's carriage, which she had hitherto had to herself, was invaded by a party of travellers, consisting of mother, nurse, and three children.

The girl had not only no love for children, but they were positively disagreeable to her; and although the year-old baby sat passive and wide-eyed on its nurse's lap, and the two pretty little fellows, in their picturesque sailor suits, only offended by their infantile chatter and eagerness to see what little was to be discerned in the fast-growing darkness from both windows

of the carriage at once, their presence and light-heartedness were almost more than she could endure in her condition of nervous tension. Of Methuen she saw nothing; and the nearer they approached the capital, the greater became her passionate anxiety. The train had only made one other stoppage—(at Vauxhall) between Salisbury and Waterloo,—and by the time it reached the terminus night had fallen in effect, though it was only seven o'clock; and the special aspect of ugliness and disrepute which belongs to that station, was aggravated by the condition of the weather.

Anna sprang out of her carriage almost before safety warranted. Her state of mind was by this time such that all doubt and diffidence were lost in what she felt was the extremity of her situation. Her claim upon Philip Methuen's protection had taken a form it was impossible for any man to resist.

For the first few moments she did not see him—that is, she failed to discover him among the men who were leaving the first-class carriages, and none of the occupants of which, she

was convinced, could have stirred from their seats before she had done. Also, she had marked the position of the carriage he had occupied with her usual precision; but for those first few minutes she refused to accept the evidence of her senses. It was not till the train, which had been a short one, had discharged all its passengers, and was being promptly shunted off the line, that the iron fully entered into her soul. He was not there. Probably he had got out at Vauxhall; and she was alone and friendless in London, almost without money, or even money's worth—for Anna's disdain of ornaments led to her seldom wearing any of the costly trinkets she possessed,—and with her hope dead within her breast.

The train had emptied itself so rapidly, that there had scarcely been time for her appearance to attract attention, and her fellow-travellers were close behind her. She heard the clear shrill voice of one of the boys in eager exclamation—“Papa! I see papa! Remember I was the first to find him out!” She hated him for the rapture which brought home more acutely

to her soul the sense of her own despair. At the same moment a porter civilly accosted her with the usual formula as to luggage and cab.

“I have no luggage, but I want a cab—not a hansom.”

The girl offered him a shilling as she stepped into the unsavoury recesses of the four-wheeler, with a grim sense of the discrepancy between her liberality and her purse: there is a sort of ghastly humour which walks side by side with some moods of desperation.

“Tell him Bruton Street, No. 17,” she said to the porter, who was still officially hanging about the cab-door. What else could she say?

During the short transit Anna sat erect, defying her fate. The stakes for which she was playing were so tremendous that to lose courage or faculty of resource meant ruin—ruin for such as she was! Involuntarily she raised her beautiful head with the old gesture of superb assurance. She was weak because she was faint with hunger, and it would be wise to renew her

strength before fighting the battle that lay before her. She stopped the cab before the door of a pastry-cook's shop they were passing.

"Wait ten minutes," she said to the driver, with as cool and haughty a gaze into the man's face as if she had been at ease in an assured position. "You need not be uneasy—I will pay you well."

She went in and satisfied her hunger with some soup and bread, but the latter seemed to choke her. Appetite was in abeyance, though exhaustion had made itself felt. She returned to the cab less invigorated than she had hoped. The rain was still falling; the lamps reflected their shadows on the wet gleaming pavements; the dripping, unfurled umbrellas of the tide of pedestrians—a tide which never ebbs—added to the oppressed and unpicturesque aspect of the streets. London looked squalid to her eyes—not like the same city as it had appeared to her, rolling through its West-end thoroughfares in one of the Earles' well-appointed carriages.

Another brief interval, and the cab stopped

before the house in Bruton Street ; the cabman descended, and came round for instructions.

“ Knock and inquire if Sir Philip Methuen is arrived,” said Anna, pronouncing the name with deliberate distinctness.

The man obeyed, and after a moment or two, evidently spent in colloquy with the woman who had opened the door to him, came back with a negative.

“ There is some mistake,” she said in answer ; “ ask the mistress of the house to come out and speak to me—or wait, I will get out myself.”

She walked through the still open doorway of the house, and confronted the woman who stood waiting in the hall, with an air at once modest and assured, and with a skilful avoidance of the light of the lamp from falling at once upon the beauty of her face.

“ This is the house, No. 17 ? ” she asked, “ where my aunt, Mrs Gibson, has taken apartments for Sir Philip Methuen ? He will not be here for a day or two possibly—he is gone to Claridge’s Hotel to meet a friend from India, and I have been sent with a list of things to

make his rooms more comfortable and home-like."

The woman looked at her steadily.

"And how am I to know, Miss, that you are Mrs Gibson's niece? It is not the right time of day for a respectable young woman to come to a strange house on business of that sort."

"No, indeed!" said Anna, suffering her voice to fall a little. "I was afraid how it would strike you, and have been fretting about it as I came along in the cab. But Methuen Place is eight miles from Trichester, as no doubt Mrs Gibson would tell you, and I just lost my train and had to wait for the express. My aunt would be in a dreadful state of mind if she knew I was out in the streets of London alone so late; as we timed it this morning, I ought to have been here at three o'clock at latest. See! she wrote down the address for me last night, for fear it should slip my memory."

The girl produced from her pocket the neatly-written slip of paper which the old housekeeper had given her that morning. The landlady

glanced at it, and saw her own name and address in the careful laborious handwriting she immediately recognised as Mrs Gibson's, from whom she had received several written communications. It was evidence not to be gainsaid, and the simple directness of Anna's manner was difficult to mistrust, in spite of the inevitable suspicion her good looks excited. Also the remarkable plainness of her dress helped the illusion : Anna owed more than she knew to her straight unflounced skirts. She was quick to detect the advantage gained.

“ My aunt said that if I could not get my work done in time to-day, perhaps you would let me have a bed under your roof instead of going to a hotel, which is not nice for a young woman by herself ; and then, perhaps, you might be able to go shopping with me to-morrow ? It is quite certain now I shall not be able to get my work done to-day ”—there was a sob in her voice.

London landladies as a class are reported to be lynx-eyed and callous-hearted ; and probably they adapt themselves, like other things, to

their environment; but there are exceptions. Also Mrs Baillie was not a little influenced by the fact that she and the old housekeeper from Methuen Place had discovered that they were both west-country women; and although one hailed from Somerset, and the other from Dorset, this is held as kinship in the Philistine capital. Moreover, she had a very imperfect idea of Sir Philip Methuen's age and appearance; she had not yet seen him, and Mrs Gibson was not garrulous.

A few minutes more saw the cabman dismissed—Anna discreetly slipping her last half-crown into Mrs Baillie's hand for the purpose—and her asylum for the night secured. Just as the cab had turned the corner of the street, and disappeared in the darkness, Anna suddenly clasped her hands together with a gesture of distress.

“My bag! my new handbag!” she cried. “I have left it in the cab! What shall I do, Mrs Baillie? My aunt packed it for me so carefully this morning; and I had some recipes in it for you for Sir Philip, who is very par-

ticular about what he eats. She will neyer forgive me!"

She burst into tears, and sobbed hysterically: it was a safety-valve for her excitement of which she eagerly availed herself, for such passionate overflow was a necessity of her nature; and the violence and genuineness of her grief made a final conquest of Mrs Baillie's motherly heart. For the rest of the evening all was plain sailing; Anna was treated as guest and equal, and accommodated herself to circumstances with admirable facility, entertaining Mrs Baillie with anecdotes of the Methuen family, which removed the last lingering doubts from her mind; and then, well fed, well warmed, and elated by success, she was conducted at night to a comfortable little bed-chamber adjoining that of her hostess.

She had supposed that excitement would have prevented her from sleeping, but youth and fatigue were too strong for her, and her eyes closed almost as soon as her head was laid on the pillow.

The next morning brought a note from

Methuen to Mrs Baillie, to Anna's thankful relief, from Claridge's Hotel, saying that he would take possession of his rooms in the course of the day, and would rely upon finding everything in readiness. This note put the good woman into a considerable flutter; the terms on which she had let her rooms had been so advantageous, and Mrs Gibson's injunctions and personal painstakings had been so solicitous, that she held her new tenant in anxious respect.

“Look round the rooms yourself, my dear,” she said to Anna, “and you will be able to see if they are all right. What a pity the list you spoke of was in the bag! Don’t you remember some of the things Mrs Gibson mentioned?”

Anna rapidly enumerated certain articles—an easy-chair of a particular description, a reading-lamp of some special construction—but added she would prefer to wait now till she had heard again from her aunt.

She professed to have written to Mrs Gibson that morning, telling of her misadventures, and excusing herself accordingly, and had, indeed, read the letter to the sympathising Mrs Baillie,

and had taken it for better safety to the post herself, where, it need not be said, it was never deposited.

As the day wore on, Anna's excitement grew almost beyond her control, and she welcomed it as a priceless relief when Mrs Baillie announced her intention of going out for an hour for commissariat purposes, saying that it was a comfort to leave some one in the house to look after the little maid. "There was no knowing what mischief they did when left to themselves ; she might even go pulling things about in Sir Philip Methuen's own rooms !"

To those rooms Anna now betook herself. The sitting-room fronted the street ; she would be able to hear a cab stop and the street door open and shut. She sat down in a chair placed in a dark corner, and began her passionate watch. "I think," she said to herself, as she bowed her aching forehead upon her burning hands, "that I shall go mad if he does not come soon ! I feel as if I could not take up this farce again."

She forced herself, by mere dint of will, to

sit quite motionless for a quarter of an hour, timing it by the chimes of a neighbouring church clock. But it was reserved for her to hear all the remaining hours of the day chimed from the church steeple, before Philip Methuen arrived ; and when at length he came, it was so late at night that the girl had been obliged to retire to her room, unable to play her part any longer.

Mrs Baillie came in to speak to her before she went to bed, and Anna was quick to observe a change in her manner.

“ I had no notion he was such a young and handsome gentleman ! ” she said ; and there was unmistakable suspicion in the glance she cast at Anna. But Anna was already undressed, and ready for bed ; what mattered the landlady’s loss of confidence ? She could not turn her out of doors that night, and to-morrow—
to-morrow would vindicate her position for all time.

That night was added to the short list of Anna Trevelyan’s vigils ; she lay awake in a half-delirious trance of anticipation, her brain

suggesting, almost realising, the incidents so soon to be lived in reality. The phantom bliss which had eluded her so long was to be grasped —to-morrow!

She would claim her own, and maintain her claim in face of any obstacle raised by faithlessness on the one side, or feminine artfulness on the other.

She could condone—smiles of passionate tenderness touched her lips in the darkness, as she asked herself what it was she could not condone to Philip Methuen—but she would never relinquish.

The knowledge of his vicinity so stirred her pulses and warmed the eager blood in her veins, as to make her forced quiescence a physical martyrdom. But at last daylight, as seen dimly in a narrow London street, dawned, and the welcome sounds of life and movement in the house became audible.

Anna's bedroom was at the top of the house, as we have said, close to that occupied by the landlady. Mrs Baillie came in to speak to her before going down-stairs.

“I would rather send you your breakfast up here, Miss Gibson,” she said in quite a different tone from the day before, and with a hard look in her eyes; “and you shall go home, if you please, to your aunt by the first train this morning.” And she whisked out of the chamber without giving opportunity for reply.

Anna rose at once, conscious that there was no time to lose; for how could she depend upon Methuen’s movements?

She dressed herself with elaborate care (as birds preen their feathers), plaiting and arranging her magnificent hair to the best advantage, and proudly comforting herself with the belief, as she studied the reflection of her face in the meagre little looking-glass, that her beauty was of the type which owes little or nothing to the accessories of dress.

She was now in her nineteenth year, tall as Honour was tall, and straight as a young pine-tree, with a certain regal gait and air which seemed to challenge the world at large to offer her anything beyond her rights. The contour of the oval olivet face, with its perceptive fore-

head and short firm chin, was perfect ; and the skin was of so exquisite a texture and tint, that the colour which it lacked would have seemed a superfluity. This fine pallor aided the effect of the full moulded lips, the slightly aquiline nose, the delicate black brows, which overarched eyes that were the crown of her beauty. To look into Anna Trevelyan's eyes was to encounter not only the physical charm of perfect colour and form, and the allurement which hangs on heavily fringed eyelids, but an expression of such passionate wistfulness as caught the attention of even the most casual observer, and quickened the pulse of interest and admiration.

She wore a blue serge gown, with soft muslin frills at throat and wrist ; but the latter had unquestionably lost their freshness. It was not a particularly becoming garb, but it fell into place about the girl's supple waist and noble limbs, in folds and lines of harmonious adaptation.

Never had she looked so beautiful in all her life before : there was a suffusion in the lustrous

eyes, a softness about the parted lips, through which the fragrant breath came in half-unconscious sighs of intense repression, and a faint flush upon the cheek, which were like an accomplished painter's last touches to a picture held to be perfect before.

She waited till the little maid had brought her the tray containing her breakfast, and had had time to reach the lower regions of the house again. And then, stealing out of her room, she glided quietly down-stairs, and put her hand upon the lock of the door of Philip Methuen's sitting-room. If he were not already there—but she hoped much from her knowledge of his early habits—she would wait for him.

He was there; sitting with his back to the door at a side-table covered with papers, which he had evidently just removed from the strong leather case which stood open beside him. At the opening of the door he turned round, and on recognising Anna Trevelyan, he instinctively rose to his feet.

For a moment he almost seemed to doubt the evidence of his senses: the first flash of thought

pointing to the baffling difficulty of her being on the scene at that early hour of the morning, with the home in which he imagined he had left her securely sheltered, more than a hundred miles away. Also, he was fully aware that she had not a single friend in London at this season of the year. Was the woman of the house known to her by some strange twist of circumstance, and had she sought her protection under some exaggerated sense of injury,—their meeting under the same roof being one of the inexplicable coincidences of life? All this rose instinctively to the surface of his mind; but at bottom, scarcely recognised or admitted, was a latent apprehension of evil—the cold projected shadow of calamity which chills the spirit with the breath of prophecy.

Anna, who had advanced half-way across the room, with a smile of delicious enjoyment of the situation upon her lips, and her eyes scanning his face, stopped short suddenly as she read something of its meaning. Beyond the first natural exclamation as he recognised her, he had not yet spoken, and he still stood motion-

less, with his hand resting on the table beside him.

“Have you nothing to say?” she asked ; “no welcome to give me?” Her tone was a compromise between tenderness and indignation.

“I have nothing to say,” he answered, “because I have no words to express my astonishment. What is the meaning of my finding you in this house? Explain, Anna.”

“Oh yes, I will explain,” she answered, struggling hard to control the passionate pain caused by his cold and peremptory manner, and with wrath gathering in her eyes ; “I am in this house because I have no other to go to. My aunt has driven me from hers ; the Earles, your chosen friends, have shut their doors against me because I did not choose to take Adrian Earle as my husband. Tell me where a forlorn unhappy creature as I am should turn for help and comfort, if not to the one friend who is bound to stand by her ?”

“I do not in the least understand. What possible connection can subsist between you,

Anna Trevelyan, and the woman of this house ? Yet it is just conceivable——”

“That there is some link of connection between Mrs Baillie of Bruton Street and my old life in Florence ! That perhaps she is, let us say, my foster-mother herself, or at least kith or kin to her, or to old Assunta of the Lung’ Arno !” The girl spoke with her passion let loose, and the ring of sarcastic scorn in her voice was of concentrated bitterness. “Why do you pretend you do not understand me ?” she demanded.

He passed by the imputation as not worthy his attention.

“You mean that *I* am the friend bound to stand by you ? Tell me, Anna, how you knew where to find me ? or, knowing it, how even you could have been capable of the madness of seeking me out here ? When did you arrive ? where have you spent the night ?”

He spoke calmly, but evidently holding himself under strong control, and he looked at the freshness of her face and aspect with an intense scrutiny in which her passionate sense

detected that admiration held not the smallest part.

“I have spent the night here, under this roof, where I spent the night before last also. I knew where to find you, because Mrs Gibson gave me your address. She gave it to me when I went, mad with misery, to Methuen Place to find you the day you left town. I did not find you—you were gone to Earlescourt; but I followed you to the station and took the same train as you did. Can you picture my situation when I got out at Waterloo, faint with hunger, without money or friends, and found you were not there?”

“And if you had found me there—what then?”

She turned very pale, and the light of her face died out, but not the resolution of it. “I should have put my hand into yours, and told you—what I tell you now—that the time was come to fulfil the pledges you gave to my dear father. They comforted him in death, and have given me courage to live my life until now.”

“The pledges which I gave to your father, Anna, have been fully redeemed. It was I who found you a natural asylum in your aunt’s house, and who made you known to a family whose friendship has enriched your life. A girl whom Adrian Earle loves talks at random when she speaks of her life as needing courage to endure. The question now to consider is how to ward off the consequences of your present indiscretion, which is more serious than you seem to have the faculty to perceive.”

He spoke with perfect decision and collectedness; but that there was a strong undercurrent of excitement was evident enough from the paleness of his face, the dilation of his eyes, and the strenuous grasp of his fingers on the table by which he was still standing. Anna read the signs aright, and the passion of her disappointment broke down the last feeble barrier of her reserve.

“You think I am an impulsive child,” she cried, “ignorant of the ways of the world, and risking my reputation without knowing it. I will try and make you understand. What I

have done I have done with my eyes open, to give me a stronger claim on what my heart is set. Are you so blind as not to see my meaning? Can you look into my face and need me to tell you the truth? I have loved you, Philip, from a little child—not, I think, as little children love—but with the germ of the feeling which has grown too strong now to be held down by any womanly shames and hesitations. See, I keep nothing back—my very soul is at your feet; I cannot live my life unless I live it with you."

She made a movement of passionate depreciation towards him, but he drew back sharply from her extended hands.

"I will not touch you," she said, with a cry of pain as if he had hurt her; "but if you do not take me in your arms and comfort me, my misery and shame will be greater than I can bear."

"And that is what I cannot do, though it cuts me to the heart to tell you so. Had I known this sooner—but it would have needed to have been very soon—I might have shaped

my life differently,—I think I would have been willing to do so. As it is, I have no longer power to direct it—as little power as will—” He stopped; there was a confused sound of voices outside the room, voices which both he and Anna recognised.

He drew a breath of inward thanksgiving.

“I thank God,” he said solemnly, “your friends are come to reclaim you! Anna—” It was in his mind to make some appeal on his own behalf to her honour and candour, but the expression of her face as she turned it upon him checked the impulse. He recognised at once that he had a woman’s vengeance as well as a woman’s love to deal with, and that the odds in the coming contest would be heavily against him.

At the same moment Mrs Baillie opened the door, and announced—

“The Rev. Herbert and Mrs Sylvestre.”

She gave a little shriek as she saw Anna.

“On my soul and honour, madam,” she asseverated, addressing Mrs Sylvestre, “I did not know she was here! Fie upon them both!

The artful hussey, she has deceived me through thick and thin!"

"My good woman," was the answer, "I have no doubt you are quite innocent of any collusion in this deplorable business. Be so good now as to leave us alone with the young lady and Sir Philip Methuen."

CHAPTER XXIV.

“ Oh ! must the cup that holds
 The sweetest vintage of the vine of life
 Taste bitter at the dregs ? Is there no story,
 No legend, no love passage which shall end
 Even as the bow which God has bent in heaven,
 O'er the sad waste of mortal histories,
 Promising respite to the rain of tears.”

—M. ARNOLD.

PERHAPS it would have been difficult for any man to have been placed in a position of more cruel or complex difficulty than Philip Methuen.

To vindicate his own honour was to deepen the condemnation of the girl who was standing before them, erect and fearless but palpitating with emotion, like some beautiful wild animal brought suddenly to bay ; and to fail to do so was to compromise not merely his own happiness, but everything which he held most

sacred—above all, the happiness of the sweet woman whom he loved better than life.

He saw as he looked at Mrs Sylvestre that she was strongly agitated, though doing her best to maintain her usual measured and imperturbable manner, and he met the gaze of her hard blue eyes with one of equal steadfastness, touched by an involuntary sympathy.

She coloured, and drew herself up with offended dignity.

“I think you make a mistake in the object of your compassion, Sir Philip Methuen,” she said. “I can only congratulate ourselves that, coming upon you unawares, we have sufficient proof of the situation to justify our demanding of you the only reparation in your power. But possibly this unhappy girl is already your wife?”

“What are the injuries I am expected to repair?” he asked.

Mrs Sylvestre looked towards her husband. The Vicar answered the appeal by an uneasy change of posture from one foot to another, and a nervous rubbing of his forehead with his open palm. When he did speak it was with a con-

siderable measure of hesitation, for there was something in the young man's look and manner which shook the strength of his conviction and anger.

"It sometimes happens," he said, "that an honourable man may feel bound to repair injuries which have been unwittingly inflicted. Mrs Sylvestre and I are in great distress; our niece is known by all the neighbourhood to have gone alone to your house two days ago to seek you, and not finding you there, to have followed you to the station and travelled up to town with you in the same train; to have thence proceeded direct to your lodgings, where she has passed the last two nights, and her aunt and myself find you in each other's company early this morning. I put it to you, as a man of the world, whether in these circumstances there is more than one course open? If, as has been already suggested, she is *not* your wife, you will not mistake me when I say that I do not mean to go back to my parish until I, or some other duly qualified person, have made her such."

Anna, who up to this moment had maintained her attitude of defiance, uncertain what position her aunt and uncle would assume, suffered herself at this point to drop into a chair, and covered her face with her hands. The stricken attitude, the flame of colour which dyed the pale cheeks beyond the sheltering fingers, did more to win the good vicar's condonation than any words could have done. She herself had no thought of the effect of the action ; her whole soul was hanging on the words which Philip would answer.

"The statement you have just made is quite true, I believe, as regards facts," he said ; "but it is equally true that Anna and I have only met within the last half-hour since she left her home."

He looked towards her, but she neither spoke nor stirred.

"Unfortunately assertions of that kind need authentication," interposed Mrs Sylvestre with a sneer ; "and I perceive that even my unhappy niece does not answer your appeal. Even if she had, it would have counted for

nothing with me. A woman is scarcely expected to criminate herself."

She stopped a moment, and looked from one to the other with a curious expression.

"You are well matched," she pursued. "A girl who has been brought up to deny God and the divine rule of right and wrong, and you, Philip Methuen, a half-pledged priest, who have masked your real character under ostentatious devotion to a false faith until you had made quite sure of your worldly interests, and sent a credulous old man hoodwinked to the grave! Still, unworthy as Lewis Trevelyan's daughter is, we will save her from the shame which she has courted."

Once more, Philip turned his pale set face towards Anna, who still sat in the same crouching posture with her head bowed between her hands.

"Have you no instinct of womanhood to defend yourself from imputations such as these," he asked slowly, "even if my honour is of no account to you?"

Then Anna dropped her hands and lifted up

her white despairing face. “What does it matter?” she answered. “Nothing that I can say or do now will wipe out this disgrace. It is quite true that you have deceived me, Philip, whether you meant it or not. If you do not belong to me, I have always believed that you did, and you have betrayed my faith in you and spoilt my life all the same. What do I care as to what becomes of me now?”

Instinctively he put his hand before his eyes; partly to hide the despair which gripped his heart-strings, partly to avoid the malicious smile with which Mrs Sylvestre continued to gaze at him.

There are some forces so relentless that no man can resist them successfully. Anna, too, watched him for a moment, and then, moved by a new impulse, went close up to her aunt as if to challenge her attention.

“You have always hated me,” she said; “but you are not false, and I will tell you the truth. I see he despises me because I have not spoken before, but it will make no difference. It is exactly as he says. I have not seen him since I left your house until just before you arrived.

But do you think that even such a girl as I am would have been mad enough to do what I have done if she had not felt sure that the man for whom she risked her reputation wanted her for his wife? I want you to believe this for my dear father's sake. Philip Methuen promised him when he was dying to take care of me as long as he lived; when he was dead he took me in his arms and kissed and comforted me. 'I love you dearly—love me a little,' he said. It seemed to me all that meant one thing only; and I felt so sure of this, that I was content to wait his own time and submit to his ways. So when your treatment drove me out of your house, I came direct to him to claim the home I thought was ready for me.—I knew his mourning was over.—I believed he cared for me. You see, don't you?—What was there to wait for?" Her voice broke as she ended, and she strained her clasped hands together, as if in the effort to keep down her sobs. Mr Sylvestre, glancing from her pale troubled face to Philip's, felt his heart harden against him.

"What my niece has just now told us," he

said stiffly, “exonerates you from participation in her imprudence, but increases tenfold her claims upon your honour. Give us the assurance we want, and we will withdraw with her to our own hotel until arrangements can be made for the marriage. You will agree with me that it should not be postponed beyond to-morrow.”

“It cannot be. I am unable to marry Anna Trevelyan. It sounds cruel and unmanly to say it, but the thing is impossible.”

He spoke as a man under torture might be supposed to speak, and his face looked as if it had been cut out of stone.

“I am this girl’s natural guardian, Sir Philip Methuen,” said the Vicar, hotly; “and if you persist in your refusal, I will do my poor best to have your dishonour known through the length and breadth of the county. No other woman shall usurp my niece’s place, if words can blast your chances. Do I offer you what is not worth having? any man might be proud to take what you contemn. It cuts me to the heart to see such a girl rejected.”

And then Mrs Sylvestre's clear cold voice attacked his ears.

“Let me offer you another consideration,” she said. “For the sake of our daughters and our own position in Skeffington, it is morally impossible that Anna Trevelyan can ever live under our roof again—she is already a byword in every cottage and farm-house in the parish. Facts are known, Philip Methuen, without their extenuating circumstances—that is, if a girl’s indecent passion can be called an extenuation. The question remains, What is to become of her? Separated from her friends, and repudiated by you, she will be a mark for the world’s scorn. Even Lewis Trevelyan himself would scarcely be satisfied with such an outcome of your pledges of service.”

“I will so provide for her honour and safety that no breath of scandal shall touch her; but, I repeat it, I cannot marry her. My life is not at my own disposal, and such a marriage would be an outrage and a sacrilege far greater than the evil it tried to avert. There are some sacrifices which it would be infamous to make.”

“Then,” said Mrs Sylvestre rising, “we will consider the last word is spoken, and will leave her to your tender mercies. It is only under the one condition that we take Anna away with us, and that you tell us is impossible. Pray lose no time in carrying out your programme for re-establishing her good name. I shall be curious to see how it will be done. For our part, we have tried our utmost for her, and—failed.”

“My dear,” said the Vicar, nervously, “you cannot, of course, mean exactly what you say. It is out of the question that we can go away and leave Anna here; if she does not come with us, we must at least find her some respectable shelter. Do you suppose she would consent to remain?”

“I would consent,” said Anna, wearily—“for what would it matter, if I am disgraced already? but Mrs Baillie would turn me of doors as soon as you are gone. I do not think she will let Philip Methuen stay here either.”

She looked towards him as she pronounced the beloved name, and his aspect so wrought

upon her, that it produced a sudden revulsion of feeling.

With a cry of distress she cleared the distance between them, and threw herself at his feet.

“Forgive me!”—and the passionate caressing diminutives of her Tuscan tongue flowed from her lips as she clung about his knees—“I did not know my love would break your heart! Mother of God!” she wailed, as he tried to disengage herself from her embrace, “do you hate me, Philip? Ah, you are cruel—you hurt my hands!”

The Vicar came forward, with tears in his eyes, to lift her from the floor.

“Have you a man’s heart within your breast, and can treat a woman thus?” he demanded sternly, as he put his arms about the girl.

“I do not know,” was the answer; and then after a brief pause he added—

“Take her away with you!”

“You mean—that is, I am to understand——”

The Vicar paused, wondering if the young man, whose face expressed nothing but a dumb agony of pain, knew the meaning of what he was saying.

Mrs Sylvestre showed less forbearance.

“ My husband is unwilling that there should be any mistake. If we take Anna Trevelyan away with us at your request, it is on the distinct understanding that you consent to make her your wife—and that with as little delay as possible.”

Philip bowed his head mechanically.

“ To-morrow ? I think the necessary matters could be arranged in time——”

“ Not to-morrow, nor next day. I will say Saturday, and make what arrangements you please.”

There was a pause of hesitation. Philip looked from the one to the other quickly.

“ I give you my word of honour—I will marry Anna Trevelyan on Saturday. Do not consider expense, if money will facilitate matters. Also, leave me your address and communicate with me here—but by letter only.”

The Vicar still regarded him with anxious attention, but the other had rallied his strength.

“ You do not trust me ? ” he asked,—and drawing off a plain signet-ring which Mr Syl-

vestre recognised as one habitually worn by the late Sir Giles Methuen, he crossed over to where Anna stood, and slipped it upon her wedding finger.

“This ring bears the motto of our house,” he said; “you may take it as a pledge of my good faith. For the rest, you will not wonder if I ask you to leave me alone, and—give some explanation to the woman of the house.”

He had not looked at Anna during this little ceremony; but the girl caught both his hands in her passionate grasp, and covered them with her kisses and her tears.

“Spare us that!” said her aunt sternly, and drew her out of the room.

CHAPTER XXV.

“ Now on the summit of Love’s topmost peak
Kiss we and part; no further can we go:
And better death than we from high to low
Should dwindle, or decline from strong to weak.
. . . Heaven of my Earth ! one more celestial kiss,
Then down by separate pathways to the vale.”

—ALFRED AUSTIN.

“ No exile’s dream was ever half so sad,
Nor any angel’s sorrow so forlorn.”

—M. ARNOLD.

PHILIP METHUEN remained standing as they had left him in the middle of the room, until the sound of their voices was silent, and he heard the house door shut upon them. Then he walked deliberately towards a chair, and sat down with the intention of facing his calamity and deciding on his plan of action. But even his strong and disciplined will refused to obey the call. For more than an hour he sat with folded arms and eyes fixed on the ground, as motionless as if life

had already left him, and with no other consciousness but of anguish so extreme that it was like the thrust of some relentless sword piercing even to the dividing of the joints and marrow.

There is perhaps one thing harder than the crucifixion of the flesh with its affections and lusts—namely, the crucifixion of the divine and the true; and hardest of all is it to know that what we endure we inflict, and that the pang which rends our own soul destroys the happiness of another for whom it is a poor thing to say we would have laid down our life.

There is a spirit of devotion to high and noble causes which commends itself at once to the magnificent chivalry of great natures; but to sacrifice the best for the worst, the good for the evil, the noble for the base, almost exceeds the limits of human endurance, and makes of the martyrdom of saint or patriot a mere pageant and self-gratification.

As the man sat, living in advance the moments that were lying in wait for him, like some wretch extended on the rack and in suspense of the turn of the wheel, the lines of his

face hardened, and the fine charm and bloom of its beauty passed out of it for ever. The gentleness which made children confide in him, and the noble sweetness which touched every woman's heart who looked at him, were scorched and consumed in the blast of that terrible furnace: the iron had entered his soul, and was subduing it to its own nature.

Even the stimulus and consolations of religion were denied him. The deed he was about to do was unholy and sacrilegious; what love had made sacred and divine was become infamous and repulsive. The convictions and influences of his priestly training, which had yielded to the solvent of a generous passion, reasserted their old power. He abhorred the idea of marriage with Anna Trevelyan: it was not martyrdom that was demanded of him, but a life of ignominy and degradation, from which God Himself would hide His face.

He was aroused by a knock at the door of his room; it had been repeated before, but he had not heard it. Mrs Baillie was anxious to know if Sir Philip Methuen would have his

breakfast served. The answer was in the negative, through the closed and locked door, and the woman missed, with a feeling of confused surprise, the graciousness of manner which had won her goodwill the night before.

Thus recalled to the details of life and business, Methuen's eyes fell on the papers on which he had been employed when Anna Trevelyan had come in, and he remembered that he had been engaged to meet Lord Sainsbury at his hotel by noon that day. It was long past that hour, but he would go ; or was it worth while to go ? Did the claims of friendship hold ? was duty still to be influential over his maimed and demoralised life ? Also, could he give his mind to literary discussion under a fastidious author's exigent demands, and answer the claims of physical pain and sickness, with the knowledge before him that ere the sun set he must stand face to face with Honour Aylmer, and exhibit to her her blessedness torn up by the roots ? Well, he could but put it to the test.

A few minutes' rapid walking brought him

to the hotel. As he entered Lord Sainsbury's room, he perceived such signs of pain and weariness on the worn face as suggested a sleepless night, and perhaps patience exhausted by his own delay, and the instinct of pity slowly stirred within him.

"I am sorry to be so late. I have been unavoidably detained, and have now only an hour at your lordship's service. Will that be enough for what we need to arrange?"

"It will not. I cannot talk within the fetters of an hour. What is wrong, Methuen?"

Lord Sainsbury looked at him fixedly. Then he rose, which cost him an effort, and followed Philip to the window, to which he had turned.

He laid his hand affectionately on his shoulder.

"If there is one man to whom you need not hesitate to speak the truth," he said, "it is surely to him with whom you have gone down almost into the valley of the shadow of death. It is something that has cut very deep, I see. It is scarcely possible, when I remember what you told me late last night, that anything can

have come between you and the woman you love?"

"It is possible. I have lost her, but through no fault of hers or mine. Ask me no more questions—I cannot answer them."

The tone was hard and unresponsive, and he avoided meeting the eyes which he knew were fixed upon his face.

"Is the misfortune irremediable, and yet so sudden? When we parted yesterday——"

Philip endured the stab without flinching, but his stoicism did not deceive the other; he forbore to go on.

After a few moments' pause, he asked, "There is, then, nothing I can do for you?"

"Yes; treat me as you did yesterday. I am afraid you have not slept well, and I am still of the same opinion about cancelling the last chapter of your book. Why defend a policy which has not been impugned, and which you would pursue again in like circumstances? I read it over once more still more carefully after I left you last night."

Lord Sainsbury could scarcely have given

his friend a greater proof of his love and confidence than by accepting the line indicated, and taking up the discussion of his literary and personal affairs at the point where they had been left the day before.

When the hour was up, Methuen rose.

“Your sister joins you this evening, and to-morrow you start for Mentone ? My best wishes go with your lordship.”

It was all he could say, for the eager eyes which met his were softened almost to tears.

“You are resolved to trust nothing to my friendship, Methuen ?”

“Mention the name and address of some priest whom I can trust. I am to be married on Saturday.”

The two men looked steadily at each other, and then the elder said, with solemn earnestness, “Is this a righteous solution of the difficulty ? Marriage is an indestructible bond.”

“I know it ; righteousness and I have parted, but—there is no alternative.”

“I refuse to believe it ; you have not had time enough to deliberate.”

“As much time as when a man is called upon to choose between the surrender of his honour and his life. I was going to say I had given up the last; but in some cases one is obliged to part with both—that is mine.”

He stopped, and then added, with a supreme effort,—“I am not the same man that I was yesterday, and even your sympathy wounds rather than heals. Let me go.”

A few hours later he was standing in one of the wide bay-windows of the drawing-room at Earlescourt waiting for Honour Aylmer. He had sent a telegram in advance, asking to see her alone, and giving some hint of misfortune; he dreaded for the blow to fall without any preparation. There were only one or two candles lighted in the stately room; but a large fire scattered warmth and brightness around, giving fantastic effects of fluctuating flame and shadow. The blinds and curtains were still undrawn, and the outlines of the trees and shrubs could be discerned in the faint gleam of the crescent moon.

Philip Methuen stood and gazed out into

the darkness, seeing nothing but the projection of his own misery, and that meant, at this moment, the sense of the misery he was about to inflict. He was, as he had been throughout the day, outwardly composed ; but this self-repression was so severe and protracted that he dreaded lest his strength should fail him in the moment of uttermost emergency. He would shorten the interview as much as in him lay : instinct and reason combine to make swift the stroke by which we save our honour and slay a life dearer than our own.

He heard the door open, and felt that Honour had entered the room ; but it was a moment before he had courage enough to turn round. She came towards him quickly, with eyes raised to meet his own, full of tenderness and trust, and both hands extended. In the presence of calamity, womanly shynesses and reserves were out of place. She wore a soft silk gown of the mellow tint of old ivory, and the ends of the sash round her waist were deeply embroidered and fringed with gold thread. There was a distinction in the simple yet beautiful costume,

which suited well with the sweet dignity of her tall and lithe figure, and the loveliness of the face eager to discover and greet her lover.

Philip, after a moment's hesitation, came forward and met her in the middle of the room, taking both her outstretched hands in his. They looked into each other's faces without speaking; but every trace of colour ebbed from Honour's cheeks and lips as she read the awful sorrow of his gaze.

“Tell me what has happened,” she whispered, almost in the tone we adopt in the chamber of death. “I can conceive of no misfortune that can part us—say, it is not that!”

“It is that, or it would not be misfortune.”

And then, in compassion to the agony of suspense she forbore, for his sake, to express, but which he read in every line of her drooping face and figure, he forced himself to say, still holding her hands firmly in his—

“I have broken the bond between us, and pledged myself to marry—Anna Trevelyan.”

He had been about to add on Saturday, but

reflection came in time to enable him to spare her this additional blow.

Honour uttered a low suppressed cry. Incredible as the announcement might have appeared to some, it reached her ears, with something of the effect of a dim foreboding realised. One flash of backward thought helped her comprehension, although it only served to add intensity to her distress. The flight of Anna Trevelyan from her home was a fact known far and wide. But even in the first moment of sharp endurance her instinctive feeling was less that of self-pity than of passionate sympathy. The expression that met Philip's sombre and concentrated gaze was one of such abounding tenderness and compassion that it went near to break down his fortitude.

He dropped her hands, and turned from her to avoid what he could not endure.

Honour's instinct was to follow him, but she forbore, and said, standing where he had left her—

“Tell me everything that it is necessary for me to know, and trust my love to bear it. I

am made for calamity, Philip. Besides, if this be so, what is my pain to yours?"

"Your pain!" he repeated; "your pain! it is that which will haunt me night and day, and turn endurance itself into an infamy. Have mercy upon me, Honour! anger and reproaches would be less cruel——"

"Then I will reproach you; were there no means of escape?"

But as she asked the question—it was so charged with misery—her voice broke, and the sound of her weeping reached his ears. He had dreaded her tears as the one thing his courage would not be able to sustain, and in effect the moment held within it the very bitterness of death. Suddenly turning towards her, he snatched her into his arms and strained her against his breast, with a passion which left her faint and breathless.

"My God!" he said, "can I forego? we are pledged to each other by ties which it is impiety to break. Honour, I am not yet hers; must I do this accursed thing? Forbid it, and I am bound to obey."

She saw his terrible suffering, and postponed hers by an instinct of her nature.

“Let me judge,” she said, softly; “and tell me everything, that I may judge.”

He obeyed her touch mechanically, and sat down on a couch beside her, leaning forward with his elbows on his knees and his hands covering his face. His voiceless despair pierced her soul; and when after a time he lifted up his head and looked at her, there was that in his changed aspect alone which carried with it a weight of woe. Seldom have a few hours worked more havoc in a human face. The lines and curves which had gone to produce the expression of assured serenity and sweetness had disappeared; the brow had taken the deep vertical furrow of intolerable pain; the eyes seemed to scorch where they fell, and the mouth was hard and set. A sudden flash of memory recalled him to her as she had seen him four years ago at the foot of the Earlescourt staircase, when he had suggested Spenser’s Christian knight to her mind, and the contrast brought with it a pang of agony. He

had been grave and in trouble then ; but that was a sorrow which purged and ennobled, having the divine element of renunciation in it—this the grip of an irremediable wrong, which degrades while it tortures.

“Let me hold your hand,” he said, “that I may feel if you shrink from me. I am not guilty, I suppose, but I have all the shame and pain of guilt.”

And then, in direct abrupt phrases, he told his burning story, without extenuation and without reproach ; and as Honour listened to details which were the knell of her own happiness, her passion of love and sympathy quickened, and she strained the hand which held hers against her heart.

When he had done, he said,—“ It is an insult to ask you whether I was right or wrong. You trusted me with your happiness, and I have betrayed you. It is a poor excuse that it was under such cruel pressure as turns the victim on the rack into a liar and a perjurer.”

He looked down upon the pale, tender, noble face raised towards his own, and it needed all

the strength of the consideration that the symptoms of his own distress aggravated hers, to enable him to suppress a groan of anguish. He put her gently from him, and, rising abruptly, turned again to the unsheltered window.

“I will go now,” he said, after a pause. “I have dealt my blow, and have no power of healing. In the future it will be well that we should never meet.”

“Never meet!” she repeated; “you take away my last hope. To have helped you in your misery would have been some mitigation of mine.”

“You could not have helped me,” he answered sternly. “Every time I saw your face and heard your voice would have rendered hers more hateful. The only comfort you can give me is to let me know that—I have not spoilt your life. I shall live mine with the hourly prayer that the time may be hastened when you will forget that you ever loved me. What was my glory yesterday is the millstone that sinks me to the bottomless abyss to-day.”

The tone in which he said this drew her irresistibly to his side again ; it was sharp with the accent of unendurable pain.

“ Philip,” she cried, seizing his reluctant hand in passionate appeal, “ you ask of me more than I can do or God requires ! You must not insist on separating yourself from me. Will you deny me the help that would come from seeing how you live your life ? ”

“ Not if I thought it would help you ; but I shall live my life as the galley-slave lives his—not escaping from it because chained to the oar.”

“ It seems so now,” she said, breathlessly, for the aspect of the averted face was almost more than she could bear ; “ but *you* will not be long held under such a yoke as that. You belong to the men who forge their spiritual weapons out of suffering. God, who knows the secrets of all hearts, has perhaps marked out these lines of sharp denial and daily martyrdom instead of those you would have chosen for yourself, and—you will not be unworthy of your vocation, Philip ? ”

“Sweet saint!” he answered, and put her hand reverently to his lips; but the thought in his own mind was that divine service cannot be based on the violation of all which he held most sacred.

“Bear with one word more,” she added; “it may help you a little to remember that --Anna did not know the wrong she was doing us.”

“I remember it thankfully; neither my heart nor yours will be given to her for prey, but—you must not plead for her, Honour.”

Then silence fell between them, he still retaining the hand he had taken, and she leaning against his shoulder. He longed with strenuous desire to cut short an interview which had exhausted him more even than he had feared; but he knew that the tender woman clinging to his side was still loath to let him go. Presently he said, more gently than he had spoken before—

“There is some comfort which you will not begrudge me, Honour, in the thought that our engagement is not generally known; it

would have distressed me greatly if your name had been publicly associated with mine. Miss Earle and Oliver must keep our secret."

"But you will send some message to Oliver?" she urged.

He shook his head. "All that will be outside my life in the future. Oliver must draw his own conclusions."

Then he drew her more closely towards him, and bending over her, gazed into her sweet face with a concentrated yearning. He gave no other expression to the despair which filled his heart as they thus exchanged their speechless farewell. He kissed her once or twice on lips and brow, but with a chastened tenderness, as if passion were exhausted.

"Forgive me, I shall never kiss you any more; kiss me again and yet again, Honour,—my pure saint, my own unwedded wife! I thank God my uncle did not live to see this day!"

He released her from his embrace, and had turned to leave the room, when the door was sharply opened, and Miss Earle advanced to-

wards them. She looked from him to Honour with keen suspicious glances.

“Forgive me,” she said, “if I am unwelcome; but I could not stay longer away when I knew that you were the bearer of bad tidings to my beloved daughter. What is wrong, Sir Philip?”

“You have every right to inquire,” he said. “I am prepared to explain, but it must be after Honour has left the room.”

“Let me stay,” she pleaded—“I can make it a little easier for you;” but he answered her by a glance of resolute denial, opening the door for her departure, and closing it again quietly after her.

“We had bidden each other farewell before you entered,” he explained to Miss Earle. “I am now at your service.—Allow me to do that for you.”

We have said that the room was but dimly lighted. Miss Earle had taken up a taper, and was applying it with quick angry movements to the chandelier above her head. She could not read his face as she wished.

“Is that enough?” turning towards her in the full blaze of the illumination, and meeting

her gaze steadily, in spite of the inward recoil of his whole nature from the scene about to be forced upon him.

She looked at him with a feeling of stupefaction ; a vague idea occurred to her that he had been guilty of some sudden crime. What else could have happened to change him in so brief an interval ?

His next words seemed to give colour to her suspicion.

“ Will you permit me to give you my explanation by letter ? ” he asked.

He was a strong man both in body and mind ; but the equipoise of the finest organisations can only resist the stress of circumstance up to a certain point, and he had tasted no food that day, though he was scarcely conscious of the fact. He was, however, painfully conscious of a failure of power which it needed a desperate effort to resist successfully ; also, he had not prepared himself for this repetition of his punishment.

“ Pardon me,” she said coldly, “ I cannot consent to wait. Your proposal means in effect

that my poor Honour should tell your story instead of you. That would not be fair."

"No," he said, "that would not be fair. I am come to-day to get Honour's consent to break our engagement—or rather, that is not absolutely true,—I have already broken it, and came to tell her so. The thing is without appeal."

His hard repellent manner had returned, and increased her indignation and bewilderment.

"Explain!" she demanded haughtily; "but, whatever the cause, I will never forgive the man who has ruined Honour's life. Also, there are others better qualified than I to call you to account for an injury you scarcely descend to recognise."

"Hear what I have to say, and judge me afterwards," he answered. And then once more he told his miserable story, with the same conciseness as before, and with scarcely less pain and repugnance.

When he had done, Miss Earle, who had listened not without angry and imperative interruptions, said harshly—

"Do you expect that I shall justify your

conduct, or agree that it is necessary to sacrifice Honour in order to preserve the reputation of an infamous girl like Anna Trevelyan ? The matter is not so easily arranged as you seem to imagine. I have always mistrusted you, Sir Philip—you were too good to be true. How do I know you have not played us false ? You were free till you chose to be bound—the girl has always cared for you. If you suffer"—she glanced keenly at him—"I have no pity for you. I wish you could add Honour's pain to your own !"

" Such wishes are vain," he said coldly, " and it has ceased to be a matter of consequence to me in what light you view my character or my conduct. I have told you the truth ; but you will, of course, accept or reject it at your discretion, and take what action you think right in the matter. Only—if you have any divine charity in your soul—I appeal to it not to betray to any other person that Miss Aylmer and I have been engaged. Also, I trust to the honour you have not pledged to keep secret these circumstances I have just related to you."

“I refuse to give any such pledges—it is effrontery to demand them.”

“I do not demand,” he answered, “but solicit, and for the sake of her we both love. You will consider—” he stopped. “Perhaps it is not necessary to say any more. Have I your permission to take my leave?”

Her woman’s heart yielded a little.

“Not till you have taken some refreshment,” she said, preserving the ice of her tone while her eyes softened. “Honour in her trouble has forgotten the duties of a hostess—let me order something to be served for you in the breakfast-room.”

“I could not eat,” he answered; “but I am thankful to take away with me the recollection of your goodness.”

Five minutes later he was driving back to Trichester in the hack-fly which had brought him from the station. He spent the night at the newly erected meagre Railway Inn, and took the first train to town on the following morning.

CHAPTER XXVI.

“ So long as the world contains us both,
Me the loving and you the loth,
While the one eludes, must the other pursue.
My life is a fault at last, I fear :
It seems too much like a fate indeed !
Though I do my best I shall scarce succeed.”

—R. BROWNING.

MR AND MRS SYLVESTRE had taken up their quarters at Haxell's Hotel, as a judicious compromise between the West End and the City, and thither they withdrew with Anna. The interval that was to elapse before the Saturday morning which was to relieve Mrs Sylvestre of a charge reluctantly accepted and grudgingly fulfilled, dragged heavily for all the parties concerned.

Mr Sylvestre was, of course, free to employ himself about town as well as a country parson is able to do at the deadliest season of the year,

and he had also the not altogether disagreeable responsibility of making the necessary arrangements for the wedding. An old college friend happened to be the incumbent of the neighbouring church of St Barnabas, and had readily agreed to perform the ceremony and give any advice or assistance in his power. Mr Sylvestre had offered what he considered a very plausible explanation of the haste and privacy of the marriage; but he had not succeeded in disabusing his friend's mind of a certain amount of suspicion, mixed with a still larger measure of curiosity.

The Rev. Edward Dormer had naturally considered it his duty to call upon Mrs Sylvestre and her niece, but had been disappointed in the object he had in view. Anna was not allowed to be seen, being kept in strict seclusion by her aunt, with the exception of a daily constitutional in the Temple Gardens. An old bencher, who was one of Mrs Sylvestre's few influential friends, had placed the key of this sacred enclosure at her disposal, as well as his opinion and advice in respect to the legal aspect of the

marriage now impending. This gentleman had asked her if no settlements had been made on her niece by Sir Philip Methuen, and evidently received her negative as a proof of gross negligence on the part of the girl's friends, and lack of proper behaviour on that of the bridegroom ; but Mrs Sylvestre silenced his suggestions with decision. It was a matter of no consequence to her that Anna would be entirely dependent on the liberality of her future husband, or indeed whether that husband would be liberal or otherwise ; while the prospect of any postponement of the marriage filled her with anxiety and apprehension.

It would perhaps be wrong to say that she rejoiced in the circumstances which were to find their climax in this forced union ; but at least the result had so much that was consolatory in it as to reduce her regret to a minimum.

To see Anna Trevelyan the wife of Sir Philip Methuen was not indeed equal to the greater and far more comfortable distinction which Adrian Earle had offered her, and was attended by drawbacks of a very substantial kind ; but it

was a great deal better than she had ever ventured to expect, and relieved her of an odious responsibility. Of course she would not be able to permit any friendly intercourse between the two families ; but as regarded any conscientious scruples on the girl's own account, she naturally argued that Anna's reputation must take precedence even of her spiritual welfare, and had almost entertained a doubt whether the Catholic idolatry itself might not be better than sheer infidelity.

Anna passed these days for the most part in the solitude of her dreary bed-chamber. She was neither submissive nor recalcitrant, neither humbled nor defiant—she lived in a condition of suspense rendered endurable by deliberate realistic dreaming.

She mapped out with curious precision the way in which she would spend her time at Methuen Place, and how she would reopen and decorate the old family house in South Audley Street, disused for half a generation,—the alterations she would make, the society she would organise, the effect she would produce by her

own brilliant personality. She would make friends again with Earlescourt (her latent suspicion and jealousy of Honour Aylmer lending only zest to the prospect), and dazzle them with the practical fulfilment of the hopes and ambitions she had often discussed under that roof. They would see that Anna Trevelyan, arrogant as they thought her, had not rated her value too high—Sir Philip Methuen had indorsed the estimate. The man whom they all admired had chosen her for his wife.

Chosen ! It may be asked whether the girl were so blind and insensate as not to be able to understand the meaning of the miserable scene in which she had just borne a part ? whether the signs of indifference, not to say of repugnance and the sharp anguish of coercion, had not been sufficiently manifest ?

For all this Anna Trevelyan had one inclusive explanation ; it was the ascetic devotion of the priest to the rule of celibacy. He did not love her—no !—but he thought love a weakness and marriage almost a crime, and her ardour offended him because his manhood was still

under a yoke. But this was simply a prejudice of education, that was to yield, like the ice-crowned mountain-tops under the heat of summer suns, to the breath of her passion.

That he did not love Honour Aylmer was proved to her satisfaction by the bare fact of his yielding to the pressure put upon him ; had he done so, she argued (for we all reason self-outward), he would have refused to yield.

If a certain recoil is felt from this condition of mind as unwomanly and unnatural, it should be remembered that the warm blood of the south flowed in her veins ; that where no spiritual faith exists self-gratification is apt to become at once the creed and goal of life ; and, in fuller extenuation, that her love had grown from childhood with her growth, and retained something of the artlessness and familiarity of the past with the tumult and intemperance of the present.

Mrs Sylvestre had been greatly exercised in mind in respect to Anna's *trousseau*, or rather of the entire deficiency of such provision. She met the difficulty by telegraphing to her daugh-

ters to forward to Haxell's Hotel the best part of their cousin's wardrobe, and by deciding that a certain travelling suit which it contained would answer fairly for the marriage ceremony.

She had not the least idea what Methuen's plans would be after he and Anna were man and wife, but he was scarcely likely to propose a return to Bruton Street. And in case of going home to Skeffington or of a more distant journey, it would be well to have the bride properly equipped.

She still nourished a secret mistrust, as perhaps we all have a tendency to do when the thing expected seems too good to be true, and which was strengthened by her fundamental belief that subterfuge and falsehood were held as very venial sins by men of his persuasion. Mr Sylvestre, contrary to agreement, had called once or twice in Bruton Street to discuss this point or that with the distinguished principal, as he called Methuen with mild jocularity, but on none of these occasions had he been admitted. "Sir Philip Methuen was out," was the invariable answer.

Her anxieties were, however, put at rest by a note received from him late on Friday evening, accepting all Mr Sylvestre's arrangements, and stating that he would be in St Barnabas' Church at the hour appointed.

No human satisfaction, however, is perfect, and there was a clause in the letter which almost overthrew Mrs Sylvestre's equilibrium.

“I propose that the marriage ceremony shall be immediately repeated at the Catholic Chapel in —— Street.”

“Does he conceive,” she demanded, “that we shall compromise ourselves to the extent of assisting at an idolatrous rite? Why, I believe they speak of marriage as a sacrament!”

She herself spoke as if even that degree of acquaintance with the dogmas of a noxious superstition was almost more than could be justified in a right-minded person.

“My dear,” replied the Vicar, quietly, “our niece will be quite enough married for you and me by my good friend Mr Dormer and myself, —she will then be Sir Philip Methuen's wife as hard and fast as the laws of England can make

her ; but he does not recognise our orders, and I hold it as a point of honourable feeling that he is willing to make the union binding from his own point of view. You would wish him to consider himself her husband ? It will simply be a bowing down in the house of Rimmon ! ”

At ten o’clock on the following morning Mrs Sylvestre and Anna entered St Barnabas’ Church. The Vicar had preceded them some time before, as he was to take part of the service, and had arranged to breakfast with his friend.

The persistent rain was still falling, and the church, closed all the week, looked more like an opened tomb than a sacred place of resort. The vacancy and dreariness were increased by the week-day aspect of inverted cushions, and linen cloths over the more elaborate pieces of the ecclesiastical furniture.

The altar itself had not been uncovered ; fine holland concealed its costly drapery, recently presented by a wealthy parishioner. Why should it have been untimely disclosed before the decency of Sunday observance made

it necessary?—its suggestive services would not be called into requisition on this occasion.

Anna was in a mood of controlled but intense excitement. A little more and her hand would be taken by the man to walk by whose side through life was the prayer of her soul, and no power could prevail hereafter to force them asunder. Was he there?

Her eager eyes scanned the vicinity of the altar with searching scrutiny; but almost before she realised her disappointment, he stepped out of a side pew, deep in the shadow of a heavy pillar, and came forward to greet them. He was accompanied by a friend, whose physiognomy and garb at once announced him as a Roman Catholic priest, and upon whose fine sharply cut face Mrs Sylvestre gazed with haughty misgiving. At the same moment, a few stragglers, attracted by the open door and the waiting cabs outside, sauntered into the church. The two clergymen entered from the vestry, and after a short whispered colloquy, they came forward to the communion-rails and signified their readiness to begin the service.

Philip placed himself on the right hand of the chancel-steps, with his companion standing close behind him; and Mrs Sylvestre led her niece forward, and stood beside her, with an expression upon her face which indicated a sense of righteous displeasure. The necessity she felt under to watch the emissary of Satan opposite her, who supported the bridegroom, somewhat diverted the attention she was anxious to give to the latter; but, as she scornfully said to herself, they were cast in the same mould. They were both pale, quiet to immobility, and with a reserve of expression which baffled her penetration. She had observed keenly when she gave Methuen the wedding-ring (which it had been her function to procure) that the hand which took it was perfectly steady, and that the voice which greeted them in those few hurried moments, was the same. But she was by no means deficient in acuteness, and the completeness of his mastery over himself only deepened the conviction of the severity of the effort which had been required. The days which had elapsed since she saw him last seemed to have wrought

the effect of years upon him, although to her mind the sternly beautiful face was more attractive than his former sweet and winning aspect had been.

As the service proceeded, a feeling of reluctant sympathy and respect stirred in her mind towards him. She pitied any man who was to be the husband of Anna Trevelyan ; but this man had reasons of his own which made the union abhorrent to him, and yet had succeeded in ordering his looks and manner into such complete subserviency to his will. Anna would be in strong hands, she said to herself with a grim smile.

Only once did she see his countenance change : it was when for a moment Mr Dormer held their united hands under his own as he pronounced the momentous words which rendered the marriage bond indissoluble.

The change was an indefinable one : a slight increase of pallor, a hardening of the lines of the resolute face, a deepening of purpose in the steadfast eyes ; but it meant the instinctive revolt of his whole nature against the unnatural

contract, and the renewed suppression of that revolt by strength of will.

As soon as the ceremony was over, he lifted his wife's hand to his lips, and received the congratulations of the little group with proper recognition. He introduced his companion with an air of marked deference to the two clergymen, who did not recognise the well-known name, as Father Florentius, and asked if they would return his courtesy by assisting in their turn at the ceremony which was immediately to follow according to the rites of his own Church.

Mr Dormer, however, excused himself on the plea of further "duty," meeting the graceful cordiality of the priest with that amount of reserve and stiffness which marked his sense of the ecclesiastical gulf which divided them.

During the few minutes spent in the vestry for the necessary signatures, Mrs Sylvestre was astonished to find herself yielding to the irresistible charm of Father Florentius' manners. He had the happiest art of saying, even of looking, the things most acceptable to the person addressed, and so filled the situation by

his tact and fluent courtesies, that any omissions on the part of Methuen were not likely to be noticed.

His recognition of Anna was so masterly an exhibition of high-breeding, conveying at once interest, admiration, and delicate respect, that Mr Dormer was irritably conscious of the inferiority of his own greeting; and the girl herself, who could scarcely resist the depressing influence of her new husband's reserve, brightened and responded.

The chapel was not more than ten minutes' distance from St Barnabas' Church, and the party reached it in two cabs. During that brief interval Philip said—

“I hope you will be satisfied with the arrangements I have made—I thought you would like to go direct to Florence. Do you feel equal to crossing the Channel to-night?”

She looked down for a moment, conscious that it was not what she liked. She would have liked to carry home her triumph to Methuen Place—to have smiled defiance into Mrs Gibson's keen suspicious face—to have kissed Hon-

our Aylmer's cheek and whispered, "I have won what I never meant to lose!" Then she glanced across at her companion, and her reluctance vanished.

"It is no matter to me where I go, so long as you are with me, Philip."

She stopped, her pale face suddenly suffused with a glow of colour.

"You have not kissed me yet," she said.
"Kiss me now!"

She put her arms about his neck and her warm red lips to his, and felt with a thrill of triumph that the pressure was returned.

It was not likely to be Philip Methuen's way to remit any point of service to which his honour pledged him,—it would have been not only a cruelty but a fraud to reject the caresses of the passionate girl who had cast her reputation at his feet. The task required of him was one that made life look haggard and bankrupt in the long future that probably stretched before them, but he had accepted it.

To his mind that meant neither flight nor evasion.

An hour later Mr and Mrs Sylvestre were standing alone on the main-line departure platform at Charing Cross, watching the express as it dashed out into the murky drizzle. She had bidden Lady Methuen farewell with a complacency that could never have been gained by Anna Trevelyan. As they turned slowly and began to walk towards their hotel, the Vicar remarked—

“Do you really think that Philip Methuen does not care for Anna? It is a very shocking idea, and no new husband could possibly be more attentive.”

“In the way of magazines, newspapers, and wraps, it would be quite impossible,” she answered, with a curious inflection in her voice. “It is also evident that he is not prepared for much conversation on their journey, nor for what there is being of a confidential nature. Perhaps you did not observe the dexterity with which he avoided the empty carriages? But the future is their own affair. Thank God, I have done with Anna Trevelyan!”

CHAPTER XXVII.

“ I shut my eyes and turned them on my heart.
As a man calls for wine before he fights,
I asked one draught of earlier happier sights,
Ere fitly I could hope to play my part.”

—R. BROWNING.

THERE are many ways of meeting the irremediable. A man may face it with absolute austerity, yielding what is exacted without protest or complaint, but adding to it no grace of gentleness or heroic effort at amelioration. In a sense, it is comparatively easy to do the thing we have admitted it to be our duty to do, with a hand of iron and a heart of steel; but it is infinitely hard to appear to fulfil the unwelcome task with the gracious freedom and fulness which flow spontaneously towards the work we choose for ourselves, and love to perform.

Amid all the cross-currents of life there is

none more baffling nor disastrous than an ill-assorted marriage. It is not a situation in which worth and honour show in heroic proportions, but it is one in which a man's or woman's capacity to endure and conquer may be tested to an extent which makes all other martyrdoms poor and superficial.

Philip Methuen has been married six months, and it must be allowed that so far he has fulfilled his duties on the lines of hard necessity alone. Anna had her rights as his wife, and they were rendered, but not a jot beyond.

They went abroad, and he allowed her unlimited choice as to where they should go or how long they should stay; but it was he who decided what society they should keep, and how they should employ their time. Whatever appeared reasonable or right for Anna to do or to enjoy he conceded, and was her unwearied companion in the doing or the enjoyment of it; but there was no appeal from his decisions.

During the excitement of constant change of place and scene, and the new bliss of their union,

the young wife was fairly acquiescent ; but six months is a period long enough to test the patience and credulity of the most love-stricken, and Lady Methuen was slowly awakening to a sense of disappointment and resentment. As was characteristic, her grievances were of a low and personal kind. She was so beautiful that every man's eye which rested upon her quickened, bringing her the indisputable tribute which she felt to be her right ; but her husband's face never glowed nor softened as he looked at her, although that beauty was his own inalienable possession, and she did her best to use it for the conquest of his senses and his heart.

Over and over again had she presented herself to him in some new toilet of bewitchery, or under conditions of studied negligence and effective dishevelment which instinct taught her were more potent still ; but no fire had lighted the sombre eyes, nor any responsive smile of perception parted the lips.. With the vehement contrariety of her nature, his coldness only served to stimulate her ardour ; if he had

fully reciprocated her passion, it probably would have cooled.

Easter fell early the ensuing year, and they returned to Rome to spend it there, diligently attending the elaborate and incessant services of the Church—the one as a point of acceptable duty, the other as offering the best field of display for her beauty and distinction of dress. A few days after their marriage, Philip had said to her—

“I think you profess to be an unbeliever, Anna; but you will be willing to allow that this is the result of early influences, not of any thinking or experience of your own. You are now bound to spend your life with a man who believes in God, and I shall require you, as my wife, to attend the services of the Church—not too strictly, but enough to give the opportunity of some word of divine conviction reaching your heart.”

“Will you not also give me good books to read, and argue with me, so as to show me my errors?” she asked, with a sort of tender mockery.

“No,” he answered, “I shall not do that, unless the time should come that you ask to be taught in the true spirit of humility. It is not a perversion of the intellect with you so much as a fault of character.”

“I would as soon kneel beside you as sit beside you,” she said, “and I like to watch you at your prayers.”

This, as we have said, was in the first days of their marriage; but when Easter found them at Rome, six months had passed, and Anna was weary of travel, and had already begun to question whether life with Philip Methuen were quite equal to her expectations, and to answer the doubt with a bitter and passionate denial.

The constant restraint he exercised over her conduct; his absolute indifference to the pleasures of the shifting society of Continental cities, even although he did not prevent her from taking her share of them; the gravity of his personal pursuits; the austerity of his rule of life; the unreasonable amount of time and money he gave to matters of philanthropy and religion,

—burdened and chafed her temper almost past endurance.

But, after all, this was not the core of the girl's disappointment. That lay in the fact that the conquest of his heart, of which she had made so sure—the yielding of his nature into the softness of passion under her influence—seemed as far off now as ever.

Rather, indeed, the chances were more remote and hopeless: with her vehement and sensuous temperament and keen faculty of insight, she could not hide from herself that either this man, whom she adored, was incapable of loving, or that she, in spite of her charms, was incapable of exciting the emotion in him. Then she missed, as all who knew him missed it, the sweetness and gentleness which had been his distinguishing characteristic.

The one circumstance that held her under restraint and rendered her life tolerable, was that his indifference to the society and attractions of other women was so complete as to mitigate the crime of his insensibility to herself; for if once the idea had been received by

her mind that what was withheld from her was bestowed elsewhere, her pain and wrath would have burst all bounds.

Another stone of offence in Anna Methuen's path was one over which it may be considered that she legitimately stumbled—her husband's refusal to return to England and go home. On this point she had the courage to renew the discussion time after time, feeling that she had right on her side.

One morning at this period, Anna was sitting alone in the fine *salon* of the suite of apartments they occupied in the Strada del Popolo. All the windows were open to the warm air, revealing a faint blue sky without fleck or cloud and palpitating with meridian heat and light; while, on the left side of the outlook, one could glimpse the terraces of the Pincio, with the white gleam of marble amidst its pines and cypresses.

She was dressed in a faint cinnamon-tinted gown, of so slight a texture as to define, almost too obviously, the outlines of the superb form it covered; and the hair, which was well drawn

back from the perfect face and twisted into heavy coils in the creamy nape of her neck, caught shades of bronze and gold in the sunshine, where she sat with a book between her languid fingers.

She had declined her husband's invitation to go out of doors, and now sat impatiently awaiting his return. Later in the day she would "receive," as was her habit on two days of the week, and would have the gratification of having her rooms thronged by the select few of native Roman society, and a more miscellaneous crowd of distinguished English and American strangers. For that occasion she had a new tea-gown prepared after her own artistic device, so unique and beautiful that it might almost have made the Medicean Venus herself dissatisfied with her unadorned perfection. But till that hour of social triumph arrived, there was a long spell of time to get through, and Philip's absence was unduly protracted. She was always eager for his return when they were apart; but to-day she had a speech ready prepared to greet him, and was wearying to test its effect.

When he came in she rose from her seat at the further end of the room, and went towards him, book in hand.

“ You sometimes scold me, Philip, because I never read ; but I have been reading one of your books this morning, and found something which has almost made me cry with longing and vexation. I will read it to you.” And she read aloud those well-known and probably best-quoted lines of Robert Browning :—

“ Oh, to be in England now that April’s there !
And whoever wakes in England sees some morning unaware
That the lowest boughs and the brushwood sheaf
Round the elm-tree bole are in tiny leaf,
While the chaffinch sings on the orchard bough
In England—now !”

She closed the book and put it down, still keeping her eyes on his face. “ Think of Methuen Park,” she said. “ Once more, will you take me home ? I am more sick of Italy than words can say !”

He looked at her from head to foot, for her toilet was of a kind to challenge attention, saw how beautiful she was, and how boldly aggressive in her consciousness of the fact, and—hated

that beauty! Also he recalled how it was she alone who stood between him and his return from an exile which was far more painful to himself than to her.

“No,” he answered, “I will not go home.”

Another vision was before his eyes, so adorable in its noble sweetness and reticence as to wring his soul with an almost intolerable regret, and to give to his voice a harshness of which he was scarcely aware. He crossed the room as he spoke, and sat down on a couch a little in the shadow of the wall.

Anna, whose keen sight could have defied a much longer distance, stood where he had left her, and looked at him with intent observation.

“We have been married more than six months,” she said—and there was a threatening vibration in her voice—“and have been vagabonds all that time. I am sick of vagabondage! Methuen Place is my proper home and yours, and I love it. I love England in the spring better than at any other time. What I ask you to do is right and reasonable. Why do you refuse? You must have some very strong reason.”

Philip was silent for a moment. Possibly, in order to preserve his sacred secret, he might have to yield this point, and had been ill advised in his persistent refusal.

“It is to be supposed,” he answered, “that I have what appears to me good reason for what I do. The quiet life we should of necessity lead at Methuen Place you would soon tire of. You must know that there is a line of demarcation between me and our neighbours.”

He had a sense of indignant shame as he said this, feeling such insincerity to be part of the ignominy of his position, and was also aware that his wife’s acuteness detected the reserve and reluctance of his manner.

“As for that,” she answered eagerly, catching at the symptoms of hesitation, “the remedy is in my own hands. I will undertake to readjust your social relations. All the county will call on Lady Methuen out of curiosity at first, and she will engage to make friends of the county. I shall also be able to amuse myself with improving and refurnishing the old house. Then there is another point you seem to overlook—

that between us and our neighbours at Earles-court there is assuredly no line of demarcation."

"Does it not occur to you, Anna, that the fact of your having refused Adrian Earle's offer of marriage, will be a difficulty in regard to any renewal of our former intercourse?"

"I am not of that opinion at all," was her eager rejoinder. "Adrian and I parted the best friends in the world. Besides, would you wish me to give up the advantage of Honour Aylmer's friendship and the satisfaction of amusing poor Oliver because—because I loved you and not him?"

She paused; but as there was no response, went on again—

"Or, granting that there may be a little awkwardness at first, will you be at no trouble to get over it in order that I may still be able to profit from the example of a girl you have always held up to me as a model? I presume you think as well now of Honour Aylmer as before you went to India?"

"Not as well," he answered, "but infinitely better. When I went to India I had only an

imperfect knowledge of her character. During my uncle's last illness I was often, as you may probably know, at Earlescourt, and learned to do her fuller justice."

The manner was so natural, and the tone so quiet, that it once more shook the half-suspicion in Anna's mind.

"In that case," she answered, "it will be just as pleasant for you as for me to be friends again with the Earlescourt family. What is it worth to me that people here know me as your wife? in one sense the honour only counts in one's own country. I want Oliver and scornful Miss Earle, I want Honour Aylmer herself, to see that I did not rate myself too high, or claim that to which I was not entitled," and the girl raised her beautiful head with an air of proud assurance, which baffled the man who heard and watched her. Presently she added, with a flash of her magnificent eyes—angry and hurt at the cold unresponsiveness of his manner—"Good as Miss Aylmer is, and perfect in your eyes, with wealth and position so far above poor Anna Trevelyan, at least she has been

able to take from her the two men, neither of whom she would have refused to marry!"

He had tried by an imperative gesture to arrest the words before they left her tongue, but failed. She took a malicious pleasure in insulting the woman that he commended, and was in a mood to defy any indignation she might arouse. But as she met his eyes there was that in their concentrated anger and scorn which helped even her blind moral sense to perceive that the sin she had committed was a heinous one in his sight.

"I have stated an undeniable fact," she said, in defiance of her inward sinking of heart. "Why do you look at me, Philip, as if you hated me?"

"I pray God," he said, with intense expression, "that I may not hate the woman with whom I am bound to live; but *hate* is not the word to express the feeling she is capable of exciting in my mind."

And he got up and went out of the room.

He walked rapidly in the direction of the Pincian Hill; but the noontide heat was so

intense that he soon turned aside into the sheltered gardens of the Villa Medici, and sat down on one of the lichen-covered stone seats in the grateful shadow of the ilex-trees, the high hedges of dense box which enclose the straight formal paths of the garden, shutting out the enchanting vista beyond. There lay the widespread Campagna, which had lost its vivid autumnal tints, and was now a delicious plain of vernal green waving with flowers, and beyond that gleamed the silver streak of intense white light where the sea melts into the horizon at Ostia.

But Methuen's object was to be free to think, not to admire the beauty which seemed an incongruous setting to such misery as his.

He had often speculated whether any hardship or misfortune could befall him which his native force of character, helped by religion, would not enable him to endure ; but now he was already doubting whether it would be possible for him to live his life with a girl capable of such measureless indelicacy and bluntness of moral perception as Anna had just betrayed.

The words which she had spoken were like the sting of a lash to the acute susceptibility with which he guarded the honour of the woman who had loved him.

He put it in this way to himself, for love had ceased to be lawful between them, and whatever was outside the range of duty was to each of them a thing to be conquered at all costs ; but also the closer insight he had obtained into the depths of his wife's unworthiness strengthened his conviction of the necessity of preserving the sacred secret of their love.

And then, for a few moments, nature wrenched the mastery from his grasp, and he suffered his mind to dwell upon the lost possibilities of life —the wreck and bankruptcy which had overtaken him, turning light into darkness, and making of existence a load almost too heavy to be borne.

His memory forced upon him that terrible scene of parting in which the patience and devotion of Honour had touched a divine height, and enhanced the severity of renunciation. The dread of moral retrogression, too, was strong

upon him. All his strength seemed drawn off into the daily struggle to endure and to forget, and he condemned himself as failing in tolerance and generosity towards his wife, in that he was abhorring what he should deplore, and hardening his heart against the manifestations of her love, where lay, perhaps, the one chance of redemption, if redemption were possible for selfishness so overmastering as hers.

There were other considerations as well. Was the outcome of his life, hitherto so full of worthy ambitions, to be nothing beyond this domestic conflict, more or less successful, with attention to such side-issues as he might be able to give ? Was this marriage to mulct him at all points—not only of happiness, but of the power of doing good in his generation ? This waste of energy and opportunity—this burying of the talents of youth, faculty, and wealth—was a crime he dare not lay upon his conscience.

He would shake off this unmanly incubus, or, at least (for that was scarcely possible), do his work in life as well as might be under the weight of it ; and perhaps—for Methuen's mind

immediately turned towards putting principles into practice—it would be wise as well as kind to reconsider his wife's wishes and return to England. That did not mean—even a return to Methuen Place did not mean—renewed relations with Earlescourt ; the instinct of every member of that family would fortify his own judgment and keep them apart.

On their way home he would visit Lord Sainsbury, who was still resident at Mentone, and of whose health he had received good accounts of late, and make the offer of his services to him in any way which seemed best. There was yet the stress of his late uncle's affectionate ambition binding upon his grateful memory.

CHAPTER XXVIII.

“Where ye feel your honour grip,
Let that aye be your border :
Its slightest touches, instant pause—
Debar a’ side pretences,
And resolutely keep its laws,
Uncaring consequences.”

—BURNS.

It seemed to Anna Methuen like one of the quips and cranks of an ironical fate, that some time after her husband had gone out, the servant brought her a card with Adrian Earle’s name upon it, and asked whether the Signora would see the gentleman before her appointed hour of receiving.

There was a brief pause of rapid consideration, the *antitheta* of compliance ranging themselves clearly in her prompt and dexterous mind. Her decision was soon formed; here would be indisputable proof of the assertion

she had so recently made, and a fresh point to urge in furtherance of her wishes; also here was relief for her intolerable *ennui*, and a tribute to her influence not to be despised in her present mood of irritation and depression.

A few moments later she was standing up, flushed and radiant, with outstretched hand, to welcome her visitor. She saw at the first glance that Adrian was looking better than she ever remembered to have seen him; he was tanned and braced by adventurous travel, and there was greater vigour both of body and mind in his aspect. And he, as he walked up the long *salon*, perceived that even his memory as a lover had never painted her so beautiful as she was, and that the familiar ring of her low melodious voice, which he had taught himself to believe had lost its power over his heart,—the very hopelessness of his passion curing itself,—set all his pulses beating at fever-heat.

“Is it really you—so soon, Adrian?” she said. “How sweet and kind it is of you to come and see me! I am more pleased than

words can say. But how did you know where to find us?"

"It is not a hard matter, Lady Methuen, for those who read their 'Galignani' to discover the domicile of such distinguished visitors as yourselves. I landed at Brindisi a few days ago, and came on here for the Easter festivities. It is so long since I have seen a familiar face that I risked denial in the hope of seeing yours."

"Why should I deny myself to you," she asked, with that simple directness of speech which was one of her best characteristics, "if you are willing to be friends with me? You must stay and dine with us. All the world is coming to us this afternoon, and I should like you to see how I play my part as *dame de salon*. Besides, I have all your adventures to hear."

So great was her own exhilaration, that she did not stop to consider whether Adrian might not find some difficulty in responding to her unexpected familiarity and kindness; and when, shortly afterwards, Methuen came in, she introduced their guest with a triumphant satisfaction, which only served to mark the contrast

between her cordiality and her husband's courteous but reserved greeting.

To the latter this visit appeared a breach equally of right feeling and good taste, and he marvelled that Adrian Earle should have crossed the threshold of his door, when he could not but believe that he had been grossly wronged and misled. It was no small addition to Methuen's trouble that explanation on the point of his seeming treachery to his friend would be impossible; the facts of his marriage it would always be out of his own power to explain.

Anna, with that sort of deliberate effrontery she was in the habit of employing when she considered she had cause of complaint against her husband, did not allow his entrance to interrupt the easy flow of her talk with Adrian; and the radiant sweetness of her looks and the dulcet cadences of her voice moved Methuen to indignant sympathy, as he watched their effect in the changes of Earle's expressive face.

“Philip was only telling me this morning,” she said, “that we could never be friends with

Earlescourt any more ; but since you have forgiv-
en me, the difficulty is removed—no one
else has a right to be angry.”

“ Perhaps not with you, Anna,” interposed
Methuen, quietly ; “ but Mr Earle and I have
a quarrel of our own which will effectually
prevent our putting his magnanimity to the
test in the future.”

He looked at him as he spoke with a steadfast gravity of regard, not unmixed with kindness and regret, but Adrian did not choose to meet it. He lifted his eyebrows and made a corresponding movement of the shoulders in a characteristic way, as though the challenge were beneath his notice, and laughed his delicate derisive laugh.

“ There is not much depth in my nature, as you know, for memories either good or bad,” he answered. “ I am willing to be friends all round, and wipe out your offences, Philip, as well as those of—others. Twelve months’ knocking about the world shows things in their true proportions. The wise man does not nurse resentments.”

Philip bowed stiffly, and Anna said with effusion—

“You do not know how happy you make me! Half the pleasure of going home would be lost if your house were shut against us. Philip cannot stand out any longer. But I must go and change my gown. You will wait? and dine? There are people coming who are worth seeing; and at any rate I wish you to remain, if only to discover that I have at length developed a taste in dress. I shall be satisfied if you approve. Philip never looks at me.”

As she went out, two other guests were introduced into the apartment—men of considerable political influence, whose names only were known to Adrian Earle, but whom it was an unmistakable honour to meet—and both he and Methuen welcomed the circumstance as relieving them from the disagreeable friction of a personal interview.

That afternoon afforded Anna Methuen one of her most acceptable triumphs, and on the strength of it her bearing to all those with

whom she came into contact was more haughty, assured, and indifferent than her wont.

She read the effect of her beauty, accentuated by the picturesque costume which she wore, in the vivid glance of every man that looked at her, and in the guarded cordiality of the women who were her guests—appraising the one tribute as highly as the other.

Adrian stayed for an hour or two longer; but the crowd was so great, and Anna's Italian speech so fluent and swift, that he contented himself for the most part with watching and listening, in a mood made up of pain and cynicism. He smiled to himself to see what hard work Philip had to do to redress the balance of Anna's insolent exclusiveness and caprice by his own fine courtesy and tact, and even admitted to himself that few men could have fulfilled the difficult function better. The man looked older and altered to a degree that surprised Adrian Earle, judging from the physical effects of his own disappointment; but there was the same distinction and individuality of aspect and manner which always challenged

attention, and perhaps justified the expression in Anna's face as he chanced to catch it when her eyes rested for a moment on her husband. Seeing that Adrian had noticed the look, she coloured with vexation, and motioned him to come and speak to her.

“ You see the girl to whom Philip is talking with that ridiculous air of interest and respect ? She is Vittoria Orsini, a girl of good birth, only just let out of her convent, and without two ideas in her head. She is not in the least beautiful—is she ? Can you help me to understand why he looks at her like that ? ”

It would have puzzled, or perhaps even disillusioned, any other man but one who had known Anna Trevelyan from a girl, that such a question could have been proposed by her to himself. As it was, he swallowed his distaste, and contented himself with answering a little spitefully—

“ She is very pretty and innocent-looking, and is of the type of woman whom Methuen admires.”

Anna turned a little pale. “ Ah, you want

to punish me! Don't make any mistakes. It may not seem so, but—I am still very fond of Philip."

"And you scarcely expected your constancy to last so long? Six months, is it? Well, I could scarcely have been justified in forgiving you if you had spoilt my life for less than that."

"Spoilt your life!" she repeated, disdainfully. "I never saw you look so well and self-satisfied before. I—I should like to ask you a question. Who told you that Philip and I were married?"

The colour came into her cheek and a spark of fire into her eyes.

Adrian glanced at her, and then looked with a disengaged air across the room.

"I saw the announcement in all the papers when I got back to Paris. I was then on my way home, but—I took another departure. I was stricken with a sudden desire to see the Soudan with my own eyes and went, and extended my tour afterwards up and down the Nile. I am going to write a book about Egypt."

“You mean that your own people did not mention it in their letters ?”

“They mentioned it simply as an event that had happened—nothing more.”

And then he turned and looked at her intently.

She was still watching her husband, and her eyes had a tender, wistful look, such as he had never seen in them before, except in connection with this man’s name. It quickened his sense of enmity against him.

“It is an impertinence,” he said, “to ask a six months’ old wife whether she is happy ; but —you sacrificed me without the hesitation of a moment in order to become so. Are you quite satisfied with the result ?”

She closed her eyes for a moment, as if to help her inward search ; then her bosom heaved, and the corners of her beautiful mouth drooped a little.

“If you had had your way and married me,” she answered, “how tired we should have been of each other by this time ! It is a great strain on human nature to have to live most of the

twenty-four hours in each other's company, and you cannot fairly judge of this without proving it ; but still there is only one man in the world with whom I could bear it, and he might make it easier to bear. Philip ! ”

Her accent, laden with passion, was the same as of old ; the same as when she stood, a pale, crude, forlorn girl, by his side, and looked down for the first time upon Methuen Place. Adrian winced under it, in spite of the resistance of his wounded pride. His eyes involuntarily followed the direction of hers ; and Methuen, as if feeling the magnetism of their gaze, stopped in what he was saying to the lily-fair girl at his side, and glanced towards them. His face had a cold hard look in it, which was new to Adrian's former knowledge of him.

Obeying an irresistible movement of his mind, without giving himself time for reflection, he said, in a low intense whisper—

“ He is not unkind to you, Anna ? ”

Anna threw up her magnificent head ; her love and her pride were cut to the quick by the lack of response on Philip's part, fully con-

scious as she was what her own face must have expressed.

“He is not unkind,” she answered; “he is cruel.”

She gave him no time to reply, nor, as he saw with an angry pain, did she so much as glance towards him to see the effect of her words. The next moment she was answering the gracious courtesies of a certain dignitary of the Church, high in favour at the Quirinal, who was pledging himself to procure for her an introduction to the inner court circle which it had suddenly occurred to her she should like to obtain; and Adrian made his way through the throng, intending to disappear without leave-taking to either host or hostess.

This purpose was, however, frustrated by Philip, who, seeing his intention, came forward to speak to him.

“You will not, then, accept Lady Methuen’s invitation to dine with us this evening?”

“No,” he answered brusquely, “I will not. I should risk too much.”

“Then you are in the right to refuse. It

will perhaps be better that you should not come here any more. We are leaving Rome almost immediately."

Adrian nodded, and passed on without shaking hands. It was his way of marking resentment —the only vent he allowed himself for the rage and pity of his soul.

That night, when dinner was over and dessert on the table, the tall wax-candles scarcely flickering though the windows stood wide open, Philip said to his wife—

"I have thought over what you asked me this morning, and have decided to do as you wish. We will leave for England as soon as you please."

Anna continued to play with the strawberries on her plate for a few moments longer in silence; then she looked up.

"You would not have yielded if Adrian Earle had not turned up to-day. You are willing to do now what you refused before, because, at the same time, you take away from me a pleasure almost as great as the one you have persuaded yourself to grant."

“I do not understand you,” he began; and then he suddenly dropped the cold reserve of his manner, and a softer expression came into his face.

“Anna,” he said, kindly, “there must be an end to this strife and contradiction between us; it lowers both of us. I know that I have often failed in patience and consideration, but I will be more careful not to vex you in the future; and you on your side must try to be more reasonable and conciliatory. Shall it be a contract between us?”

He had meant to infuse more affectionateness into his words and manner; but the sweetness and the tenderness seemed beyond his power to force or simulate, and he felt he had failed as he met Anna’s eyes.

“Let us talk about your part of the contract first,” she answered. “Do you mean to behave like other men when we get back to England? I mean, will you allow me to take my proper place in English society? Will you write to your lawyers at once—say to-morrow—and give orders to have the house in South Audley Street

put in proper repair, and refurnished as it ought to be at the beginning of a new reign ? And while that is going on, will you take apartments or a house in town, so that I can have my own way as regards details and decoration, and enjoy a London season in my own right ? Will you do this ? ”

There was provocation and defiance in her tone, but he was strictly on guard.

“ Yes,” he said, “ within certain limits I am prepared to do this.”

“ But that is not all,” she continued, and she put her elbows on the table, and leaned her dainty chin upon her clasped hands, with her beautiful eyes full on his face. “ When our house is ready, will you consent to entertain in a proper manner—not in your narrow exclusive sect, but without distinction beyond that of social advantage ? ”

He smiled a little, with that sort of aloofness from her power to wound, which hurt her heart and pride alike.

“ I shall always reserve to myself the duty of choosing the society we keep,” he answered ;

“ but I have never been accustomed to confine it to members of my own communion, which is not a sect, little Anna, but the dominant creed of Christendom. For the rest, I am not only willing but anxious to meet your wishes so far as my means allow.”

“ Your means !” she repeated. “ Are you not rich ?”

“ I am not rich as Sir Walter Earle is rich, and I have heavy arrears of obligation to meet. A great deal of building needs to be done in Skeffington ; and there are some streets in Crawford, which are part of the Methuen estate, which admit of no improvement without complete demolition.”

“ And you will waste your money like that !” she cried. “ And when life is so short, and so soon over, and wants so much to make it bearable ! I do not think that this is fair to your wife.”

“ It will make no difference to my wife. I have already given instructions to my lawyers, Anna, to draw up a deed of settlement which will make you quite independent of me as re-

gards your personal expenses. But these different claims will leave no margin for extravagance or ostentation."

"And is the money you allow me calculated on the lines of my poverty and friendlessness, or——?" and she paused without finishing her sentence.

"Yes," he said, quietly, "I think it is; at least Messrs Chapman & Hurst tell me that it exceeds the provision made by my late uncle on behalf of his wife, and therefore it can scarcely be considered as below your rights——"

"Oh!" she exclaimed, eagerly interrupting him, "she and I don't stand on an equality! I have heard Sir Walter Earle say that Sir Giles Methuen adored his wife. You know quite well that the scale in which my claims are weighed is empty of all that, and you throw in more gold to make the balance even! Do you remember you spoke just now of patience and consideration? such words are an insult to me. Philip, I shall learn to hate you if you will not love me a little for my much!"

She pushed back her chair from the table,

and, getting up, came half-way towards him, then stopped short, with her clasped hands crossed on her breast, and her beautiful head bowed in an attitude almost of supplication.

“I wonder you can resist me!” she said, in her low *traînante* voice.

The colour rushed into his face, and his brow contracted. The capriciousness of a temper which veered from insult to tenderness within the space of ten minutes—a love which demanded and offered caresses only as proof and test of its existence, and ignored or outraged the deepest feelings of his nature—which stooped to the arts of the mistress instead of maintaining the dignity of a wife—revolted him, and closed his heart against her, and would have done so without the effectual barrier of absolute preoccupation. Had Anna known it, she could not have riveted the bonds of the old love more firmly than by offering perpetually so glaring a contrast.

And yet he condemned himself, inasmuch as he could not coerce his soul to the fealty to which he had pledged himself. Had her love

been nobler, it might have subdued him—but such as it was !

Such as it was, some response was required from him.

He rose to meet her advance, and taking her hands in his, drew her close to him, and looked earnestly into the expectant flushed face raised to his.

“ You do both of us a great wrong,” he said, “ when you take this posture of humility, and beg me to care for you a little. I have cared for you, Anna, since the day we first met—do you remember ? Your father took me to the Fiesole farm to see you, and you ran and hid yourself behind the pine-stack, and could not be persuaded to come out and show yourself. In those early days you used to scold me because I did not kiss you often enough. I am just the same now as then. I have never lived with tender women, nor learnt to show affection after their fashion ; but it exists. Anna, there is nothing lies so near my heart as your happiness and welfare. Do not let us quarrel ! ”

He stooped and kissed her as he spoke ; and

she, moved by a finer instinct than her wont, forbore to fling her arms about his neck and repay his kindness with her ardour.

“If I could be quite sure,” she answered, leaning her lovely head upon his shoulder, “that it is your way to love in this reluctant fashion, and that you are keeping nothing back from me! But if I thought, or knew, the woman lived whom you could have loved better than me—in another fashion—it would be a bad day for all three of us when Anna Methuen made that discovery.”

“That day will never come,” he said quietly, and kissed her again as he spoke; but for the first time a doubt flashed across his mind whether he had taken the best and noblest way in concealing the length and breadth of the sacrifice which she had extorted from him.

CHAPTER XXIX.

“ Who knows what's fit for us ? Had fate
Proposed bliss here should sublimate
My being—had I signed the bond—
Still one must lead some life beyond,
Have a bliss to die with, dim desried.

• • • • • • • •
Earth being so good, would heaven seem best ? ”

—R. BROWNING.

THE three months which followed the Methuens' return to London were perhaps the happiest period which Anna had ever known. Philip, as she expressed it to herself, seemed to have turned over a new leaf, and to be bent on helping her to fulfil the programme of triumph and self-gratification she had marked out.

They took a house in Gloucester Place for the season—for so searching were Anna's reforms that there was no possibility of their own being ready for occupation—and very soon they had

made good their admission into the innermost circles of London society. Their success was due in no small measure to the active friendship of Lord Sainsbury, who in their behalf threw off the indolent cynicism with which he was credited. He did his utmost, by his own generous recognition of Methuen's former services and worth, to indicate to his immediate friends the terms on which he accounted him entitled to be received, and extended to his wife so much kindness and consideration as served at once for a *cachet* of distinction. Lord Sainsbury's efforts were seconded by his widowed sister, Mrs Auchester, who was the mistress of his house, and his ready co-operator at all points ; and Anna, at once flattered and grateful, showed to better advantage than at any former period. A girl so beautiful as she was bestowed pleasure and conferred distinction upon any company that she joined, and her personality was so unique and brilliant that it enhanced the first impression of her good looks. She was neither intellectual nor well read, and almost as ignorant of the great questions of the day as she was

indifferent to them—self being the centre of all her radiations; but she had great tact and promptness of perception, and could not only cover her ignorance adroitly, but, by guarded generalities and an air of wistful consideration, assume a knowledge she did not possess.

As a hostess, Lady Methuen did not excel, except in a certain artistic individuality as regarded the accessories of her table and surroundings; for she was too intent on monopolising the chief share of attention and admiration, and found it irksome to be civil to other women without the direct view of personal advantage.

But here Methuen's innate and carefully trained courtesy helped to fill up her own shortcomings. He succeeded without effort where she failed, because the pleasure of each guest was not only the professed but actual object of his solicitude; and while every word and action seemed regulated by some unerring law of subtle adaptation, the absence of strain or self-consciousness was obvious to the most casual observer.

Although no longer officially connected with

Lord Sainsbury, his time and services were still greatly at his former chief's command ; and indeed it soon became pretty well understood in their own immediate circle, that if there were any difficult work to be done on the lines of social or political philanthropy, demanding sustained and personally unrewarding labour, Philip Methuen was the man to fall back upon.

At the same time, he never permitted these engagements to interfere with Anna's legitimate claims ; or rather, while he put it in this way to himself, he was equally influenced by a deep-rooted mistrust of her discretion and right feeling. He not only rode with her in the Row when her mood inclined to so healthful an exercise, but he often sat beside her in her carriage during her unwearyed afternoon perambulations—unwearyed because the tributes offered to her vanity never ceased to please—whenever he knew she had no other suitable companion. When she was not under the sufficient chaperonage of Mrs Auchester, he accompanied her to her evening amusements, and fulfilled the function of the hour without

apparent grudging or impatience; nor did he ever claim her gratitude or hold himself entitled to it, for sacrifices which were almost as hard as stern duty under any aspect could have exacted from him.

Anna was never unwilling to exhibit in society what accomplishments she possessed, and she would have been quite ready to exercise in its behoof her singular talent of improvisation, as well as her brilliant musical gifts, if Philip had not put an absolute veto on the exhibition of the latter. It was a point she yieldeded with the greatest reluctance, knowing her own powers of fascination; but she consented to do so as being fairly satisfied with the present state of things, and her husband's general subserviency to her will and pleasure.

It is almost unnecessary to say that Lady Methuen was neither an acute nor a delicate observer. A woman who could misinterpret, as she had done, the signs of repugnance and despair in the scene which had fixed her destiny, was scarcely likely to read aright the less marked and carefully guarded manifestations of

Methuen's daily behaviour. She was beginning to accept the studied kindness and conscientious observance as the nearest approach to love and its expression that his temperament admitted, and his incessant companionship as a proof of her growing influence. It is equally true that she still missed, with an angry pang, the response to her own ardour which she had felt so sure of awakening ; but she was so absorbed in the novelty of her social triumphs, that she had not the same leisure nor inclination to brood over her disappointment.

There was one, however, whose sagacity was more penetrating. Lord Sainsbury watched the young man whom he loved, with an almost paternal anxiety and respect. Intimate as their relations were, Philip Methuen held inviolate the secrets of his married life—no disclosure nor complaint ever passed his lips. Every attention and service offered to Anna was accepted by him with a cordial gratitude that could scarcely have taken a warmer tone, and his personal treatment of her was perfect in its consideration and loyalty. He was simply

putting into practice the resolutions made in the Medici Gardens, and the purpose expressed to his wife before they left Rome ; and that with a completeness and success which were the result of a harder struggle than the discipline of St Sulpice, or the mission-field of the Corea, would ever have exacted. But such victories leave their scars ; and it often cut Lord Sainsbury to the heart to detect, in the tamed enthusiasms, the eager acceptance of work apart from personal choice or interest, and the constant effort to conceal his latent weariness and dissatisfaction, that Time had as yet brought to Methuen but little healing on its wings.

Gracious as this good friend was to Anna, and prepared to admit her attractions, he had no personal liking for her. Apart from the fact that she, in some way he did not understand, had spoilt the life of his friend, her obvious lack of all the nobler elements of character, and her conspicuous unblushing self-seeking, were keenly discriminated by him ; and there were moments when, reading by some instinctive move-

ment how sharp was the jar received by the man doomed to be her life-companion, he could scarcely repress some manifestation of sympathy.

He had even questioned in his own mind whether he should break the reserve between them and solicit Methuen's confidence; but this would not have been easy in contact with the resolute silence the latter chose to observe, and which was carried out so completely, that he never recognised any hint or suggestion, however guarded or kind.

An incident, however, occurred about this time which broke down the barrier of reticence between them.

It happened one morning early in July that Lord Sainsbury and Philip were walking arm in arm across the Green Park, engaged in earnest discussion of an incident which had occurred in the Lower House the night before, and was regarded by the former as a significant indication of a growing schism among the members of the Government, welcome to a man strong in conscientious opposition. Their political views

were almost identical ; and Philip was speaking with the quiet incisiveness and acute judgment of results involved, which always caused his late chief the most intimate satisfaction, when he paused suddenly, and made an involuntary movement as though he would have withdrawn his arm from his companion. Lord Sainsbury looked up quickly for an explanation.

It was not very far to seek. Following the direction of Philip's eyes, he saw that Sir Walter Earle, with Honour Aylmer on his arm, had just entered the Park from the lower Piccadilly end, and were advancing along the path, evidently prepared to greet them with every sign of cordiality.

Escape was impossible ; and yet the glance which Lord Sainsbury had cast into Philip's changed and set face convinced him of his absolute reluctance for the inevitable encounter, and moved him to give what help was in his power by taking the initiative upon himself. So, withdrawing his arm from his companion's without the least hint of comprehension, he took a few steps in advance to meet Honour, and to

encounter the first animated overflow of the baronet's greetings.

“Well met!” cried Sir Walter, cheerily. “I never saw your lordship look in better health and spirits; and I am delighted at the chance of meeting Methuen again and being able to offer him at last my congratulations on his marriage. All is fair in love and war,” he added in a lower tone, grasping Philip’s extended hand with great cordiality; “and I am quite prepared, if you will allow me, to call on Lady Methuen and wish her joy.”

“Anna will take it both as an honour and a kindness.”

Methuen succeeded in saying these words with a perfectly conventional manner; but there was a further duty required of him, which needed a harder effort to fulfil. The unexpected sight of Honour, and the instant impression he had received that she looked thinner and paler than of old, taxed his self-control to the uttermost; but the involuntary tension of his gaze, and the growing look of pain in his eyes beyond his power to efface, were an appeal to which

the tender and stricken woman hastened to respond.

“Sir Walter only speaks of himself,” she said, smiling; “but Miss Earle and I shall be just as pleased to be friends with Anna if she will let us. Our stay in town will be very short this season. We are only just arrived, or I suppose we should have met before, and we soon go home again. Oliver is not so well.”

Lord Sainsbury, who had immediately engaged Sir Walter Earle in conversation on the subject which their meeting had interrupted, now slipped his arm through the baronet’s, and prepared to retrace his steps in the direction in which the other appeared to have been going, so as to leave Honour and Methuen at liberty to fall behind.

It was a consideration for which his friend did not thank him.

It may be thought that Methuen’s creed was a narrow one, for it ordered simply this —to turn his back on the temptation which he feared. After the first inevitable gaze at meeting, he had averted his eyes from her.

It was necessary to walk by her side; but he did so looking straight before him, and with the consciousness, quickening with every breath he drew, that the mere sound of her voice had stirred to their depths the remorse and despair of the future, which were as profound as on that day of separation.

This man's love had not been one passion among many—a little stronger and purer than the rest,—but the very breath and essence of his manhood. To be thus brought face to face with Honour, was to have the vision thrust upon him from which it was his deliberate desire to escape—that of the heaven he had lost and the hell to which he was condemned.

Some attempt at speech, however, was imperative; and as soon as he could trust his voice he said, falling back upon her last words—

“ You mentioned Oliver. He is not seriously ill, I hope ? ”

“ He has been worse than I ever remember to have known him,” was the answer. “ His life is increasingly hard to bear, and—he can-

not bear it. The physicians, too, give us no hope of improvement."

"And you?—forgive me this once—I thought you looked ill. I pray God, Honour, that it is because you have been suffering with him?"

"Yes," she said, quietly, "it is just that; and Miss Earle insisted on bringing me up to town for a month."

She forbore to call him by his name, or to ask him any questions. Indeed, all that her tender heart yearned to know she had read in his face and voice, and her own quiet hopeless misery which she thought she had reduced to submission, stirred and quickened with a convulsive life.

He did not break the silence which had again fallen between them for several minutes, then he said—

"You spoke just now of being friends with Anna; but, understand once more, the thing is impossible. Promise me that you will not make the attempt—out of mistaken generosity."

"I promise whatever you wish; but—you must let me take advantage of this opportu-

ity!—I believe we might meet without harm, and strengthen and console each other."

"You might so meet," he said, abruptly—"not I!"

Then perceiving that Lord Sainsbury and his companion, who were some way in advance, had stopped as if to take leave of each other, he added quickly—

"Do not form wrong conclusions because I have behaved like a churl and a coward this morning. The shock of seeing you took me so utterly at unawares. I want you to know that time has done something for me—that there are alleviations in my life. I am able to take pleasure in work once more. Anna—Anna behaves well and suspects nothing. I believe she is happy."

Here he looked at her; his reluctant gaze devouring the pale, lovely, pathetic face.

"You are not really ill?" he asked, in a hoarse whisper; "tell me I am not so miserable as to have been able to hurt your health!"

"No, no," she answered eagerly; "I have been quite well until lately. I am only a little

fagged with anxiety about Oliver. Don't be angry with me if I say the sight of you has done me good. I can see in your face—Philip—that you are strong and brave, as I dared to tell you you would be. I thank God it is so! It is the one thing which makes my heart sing a little for joy."

Their eyes met: hers, woman-like, shining through tears of tender reverence, his softened to an expression of poignant sweetness, to which his face had long been a stranger.

"Then I am glad we met," he said, and took her hand in formal leave-taking, for the others were close upon them by this time.

"When may I tell Anna you will do her the honour to call?" he asked of Sir Walter, with a perfect recovery of his usual manner.

"To-morrow, if you like. I will come and ask her for a cup of afternoon tea, since I perceive, Methuen, you have no intention to ask me to dine."

"No guest can be more welcome to either of us," said Philip, smiling; "come to-morrow and dictate your own conditions."

When they were gone, he turned back to Lord Sainsbury's side, taking up the conversation, after his wont, at the precise point where it had been interrupted ; but the other did not intend to be put off.

“ It hardly seems worth while, Methuen, to keep up the pretence of indifference with me. I like you well enough, but I should like you better if you would draw oftener on the sympathy of your friends.”

“ That is a reproach which Lord Sainsbury should be the last man to make to me. It is not long since I came to you telling you frankly the story of my trouble and asking for help. You helped me generously, even to the extent of leaving your retirement sooner on my account.”

“ And does it not strike you that this is all the stronger reason why you should trust me now, when I see with my own eyes what must be still more obvious to yours ? It is not only your own life which has been spoilt—Miss Aylmer is very much altered.”

Philip did not speak directly. “ If this be

so," he said after a little, "sympathy can only take the form of silence, for there is nothing to be done. Words waste strength. I want all I have to walk straight and live my life decently. What has happened this morning will not make things easier, nor would it do so to talk them over with you. Your kindness would not help but hinder me. Forgive me if I seem ungrateful."

They walked on in silence for a few minutes, then Sainsbury said—

"Things are evidently drifting towards a renewal of intercourse between the families,—will that help or hinder your happiness, Methuen?"

"They must not so drift," was the answer. "There is no question of happiness concerned—it would be the ruin of peace and honour on all sides." They had turned into Waterloo Place, and were now just opposite the Travellers' Club. Philip stopped.

"I think your lordship said you were going in here this morning, and I will ask leave to wish you good morning. Frankly, I shall be glad to be alone."

CHAPTER XXX.

‘Who is it that says most ? which can say more
Than this rich praise—that you alone are you ?

• • • • •
You to your beauteous blessings add a curse,
Being fond on praise, which makes your praises worse.’

—SHAKESPEARE : *Sonnets.*

ON the same morning that this meeting had occurred, Adrian Earle called on Lady Methuen in Gloucester Place. Anna welcomed him with a cordiality which at once flattered and provoked him.

“ It is odd,” he said, as he let go the hand she extended, “ that you never knew how to be civil to me till civility was of no value. Why are you so pleased to see me ? ”

“ I want you to go with me to South Audley Street and speak the final word about the arabesques for the drawing-room ceiling. They are

pretty, but impoverished-looking—indeed that is what they are! I have discovered a young Italian genius who has sent me some perfect designs for centre and angles—scenes from the ‘Decameron’—but Philip says we cannot afford them. I thought when I was Lady Methuen I had heard the last of that detestable formula.”

“Ah!” said Adrian in a low suggestive voice, “we are always a little behind our expectations.” He threw himself into a low lounging-chair, clasping his hands behind his head in a favourite attitude, and looked up at Anna with an expression of fine raillery.

His morning dress was perfection; a glance showed that the art of physical personal cultivation had been carried to the highest point. There was an extreme delicacy and refinement conveyed by every feature and limb, every turn of expression and of movement. The thought came into Anna’s mind that he was a great deal more attractive now than in the days before her marriage, and her face flushed a little.

“I think I can read Lady Methuen’s thought,” he resumed, still speaking with the same slight-

ly ironical inflection. “She is speculating whether, if she had married the humblest of her humble servants, his income would have been adequate to ‘Decameron’ episodes on her drawing-room ceiling.”

Anna’s colour deepened. Love cannot exist without some sense of loyalty to its object, and daily contact with virtue breeds discrimination.

“You ought not to say such a thing as that; not that it really offends me, but I feel that it ought to offend me. I had no such thought; though now you mention it, I do wish Philip were as rich as you. How much do you think a man ought to spend in charity?”

“Personally, I am quite content with the law as my almoner, and what little adroit mendicancy extorts from my pockets; but I can believe it possible that a man like Methuen, who is tied hand and foot by the notion of religious obligation, may give a *tithe* of all he possesses.”

“Ah!” she cried eagerly, “and you look upon that, of course, as the *ne plus ultra* of re-

ligious fanaticism ? Well, you are both right and wrong. That *is* what Philip gives, and counts it—nothing ! He says *that* is a debt, and charity only begins after it is paid."

Adrian slightly shrugged his shoulders.

"Then, though you will tell me again I ought not to say it, I think you have every right to consider yourself ill-used. You will remember, Anna, that you told me in Rome you did so consider yourself."

"Yes," she said, "I told you so, but it was not true ; or, if true then it is not so now, and never was in the sense that you would understand it." And then, after a pause—"I thought you and he used to be good friends ?"

"We drew together pretty well before he went to India—never since his return." He hesitated and added—"Besides, no friendship could stand up against wrongs as great as one man can receive from another. But on this subject it is forbidden me to speak."

"Is it ? I don't in the least understand. You need not mind saying what you mean to me ; I am very tolerant of wrong-doing. It

may sound odd, but I should really be almost glad to know that Philip had behaved badly in some way or another! Can't you understand how irksome it is to live with a person who is always in the right, especially," she added in a lower tone, "when he has no difficulty in proving that you are always in the wrong?"

Adrian got up and sauntered to the window. He could not trust himself to look into her face. He had seen the sudden suffusion of her eyes, and heard the vibration of sensibility in her voice, and was moved by them to an indignant and passionate sympathy. He said to himself (as all men say in the same circumstances), that if she had been happy he could have been content; but the knowledge that Anna Methuen was suffering from the indifference and neglect of the man who had taken her from himself, and was wasting with conscious pain the ardent tenderness he would have given years out of his life to obtain, was too hard to bear in silence and patience.

He was not perfectly acquainted with the circumstances which had led to their marriage;

but the gossip of the neighbourhood could not be shut out from his ears, and he had a general impression that there had been indiscretion on the one side, and sacrifice more or less on the other. He had also naturally questioned the members of his own family ; but, with the exception of Oliver, they had preserved an honourable silence. From the latter, however, he learnt enough to acquit Methuen, however unwillingly, of deliberate duplicity towards himself. At the same time (so difficult is it for either man or woman to estimate fairly the claims of the human creature whom they love), Adrian argued that the personal sacrifice in marrying a beautiful girl who had betrayed the secret of her love could not have been very great, and, anyway, the man who undertook it was bound to render her happy. To himself Anna was still now, as before, the great prize of life—lost, indeed, but none the less precious on that account—and her unhappiness and discontent touched him more closely than his own.

“ Do you remember,” he said, coming back

to her after he had recovered his firmness, “that I once told you that if ever the time came when you wanted help and comfort, you would find me ready to give it? If there is anything I can do, put me to the proof, Anna.”

He was half amused and half mortified at her answer. The rare mood of sensibility was over, and the intrinsic selfishness of her character reasserted itself.

“Help me to get this thing done as I wish. Yesterday Lady Andrew Pattison went through the house with me, and I told her what I had planned, and that Philip would not consent. In her bold way—you know her, I suppose, like all the rest of the world?—she laughed to scorn the notion of my subserviency to his will and pleasure. ‘Give the order, my dear, and take the consequences,’ she said, ‘or else you may write yourself down *slave* for life.’ But I am a coward after all; I don’t dare to do that. I am afraid of Philip.”

The colour came into Adrian’s face.

“The thing could easily be managed,” he

said. “I have given you no wedding present, Anna, and this is but a trifle! Order your painter to do his best, and”—he looked at her eager face to see how far he might venture, and added quietly—“send me the bill.”

“Without telling Philip?”

He smiled in spite of himself at the bluntness of her perceptions: it was a little shock even to his infatuation; only with that eager wistful look in her eyes, how beautiful she was! Through life Anna had always accepted gifts as a prince accepts his dues.

“Tell Philip that your *protégé* has consented to paint your ceiling for the honour of the thing, at the same price as the arabesques would have cost, and—arrange with the man accordingly. I need not say my name is not to appear. You will pay the difference out of your pin-money.”

Anna reflected. “If no one ever found it out, I would not mind; for you are very rich, and will not miss it, and I shall have to live a great part of my life in that room; only Philip is not easily deceived. He seems to know what

everything is worth ; he would never believe that the man would do such good work for so little money."

" Not if the artist told him so himself ? " he asked, significantly.

She coloured. " I will think about it and let you know ; " and then the wistful preoccupied look grew less concentrated, and she turned away from him and approached the window.

The sight of Adrian's groom leading his master's horse up and down before the house suggested to her mind a new train of thought.

" How delightful it would be, " she said, turning round with great animation, " for you and me to ride together in the Park ! Is there any reason why we should not ? I can get my horse brought round from the livery stables in ten minutes,—crossing the room and putting her hand upon the bell,—" that is, if you have no better engagement. Philip is with Lord Sainsbury, and will not be home to luncheon. Let us go ! it will be like old times again."

Of course he assented, and Anna, moved by

some inexplicable coquetry, exerted herself to please him as she had never done before. She talked continually of Earlescourt, as if the happiest days in her life had been spent there, and offered him the subtle flattery of recalling things he had done and words that he had spoken in the far-away past.

Then she looked to superb advantage on horseback: men turned back to look at her, not only because she was beautiful, but that she seemed to radiate vigour and health like some youthful goddess.

Adrian could have wished that she had known fewer people, and not responded so freely to the recognition of her friends. He was scarcely willing as yet that their names should be mentioned together.

Amongst those who accosted Anna was a well-preserved handsome woman, with the bold direct gaze and perfect *aplomb* which indicate a comfortable assurance of recognised social standing. She was riding a thorough-bred mare, groomed to the highest point of perfection, and the servant in attendance was

mounted on one of the showiest cobs in the Row. She stared hard at Adrian, and then said, with the matchless effrontery of the modern woman of fashion—

“Introduce me to your cavalier, my dear! It is quite refreshing to see you attended by some one else than your husband. Personally I adore Sir Philip Methuen, but I applaud every effort in the direction of conjugal independence.”

Anna named Adrian without the slightest hesitation, saying a little spitefully—

“But I thought Lady Andrew Pattison knew all the world?”

“No doubt,” interposed Adrian; “therefore the conclusion is that I have been out of the world.”

Lady Andrew regarded him attentively.

“I know your father,” she said; “but there are no young men like him. I never remember to have seen you before; you must have been in hiding or going round the world, as they all do nowadays. Every one I meet bores me about Japan!”

“I can undertake to bore you,” said Adrian, “without going so far afield.”

She gave him a bright look and nod of encouragement.

“Come,” she exclaimed, “we shall be good friends; but we must not stand here any longer —my mare objects to have her haunches constantly jostled. It is marvellous how few people can steer clear even of so pronounced an impediment as myself!”

They walked their horses leisurely the full length of the Row, Lady Andrew Pattison not only taking the lead in conversation, but ignoring or overwhelming Anna’s attempts at participation. As regarded Adrian, she simply took possession of him, eliciting his opinions and taking his measure while offering him perfumed doses of ingenious flattery.

Anna, who never willingly submitted to the *rôle* of spectator or subordinate, broke in with a certain defiant unconventionality, saying it was time for her to return home, and they would bid Lady Andrew “Good morning.”

“We will turn at once,” was the answer.

“It shall never be said that it was my fault that Lady Methuen neglected her domestic duties. By the way, have you thought twice about the matter we were discussing yesterday, and made up your mind to give little Farini the chance of winning himself immortality?”

There was a latent sarcasm in the tone which brought the angry colour into Anna’s face. The speaker was evidently prepared for a negative.

“I think that may possibly be the conclusion that I shall reach,” she said coldly, “only, I mean to submit his designs to a little closer investigation. Some of them struck me as——” She hesitated and blushed.

“As—as—having a *soupçon* of impropriety?” laughed the other. “My dear, that simply means they are relieved from absolute insipidity; but I frankly own I am out of my reckoning. I did not think *lo sposo* would yield to the pressure applied. No conquest, I see, lies beyond your bright eyes. It will be the prettiest room outside Belgravia. Ta, ta, *ma belle*.”

CHAPTER XXXI.

“ I would I could adopt your will,
See with your eyes, and set my heart
Beating by yours, and drink my fill
At your soul’s springs,—your part, my part
In life, for good and ill.”

—R. BROWNING.

SIR WALTER EARLE paid his congratulatory visit to Lady Methuen as he had promised, and made several observations.

He had always, as men do when not subjected to their influence, condoned Anna’s faults of character and temper on the score of her beauty, and he perceived that the development of that beauty even went beyond the promise of her girlhood. Had her manners been as captivating as her person, he said to himself, she would have been simply irresistible. But Anna, unless bent on being gracious, was too scornfully indifferent, too socially negligent to please.

Society abhors egotism, and demands at least the appearance of unselfishness, and Anna's self-seeking was rarely in abeyance. It is true she did her best to win the goodwill of Sir Walter Earle; and the sparkle of pleasure in her eyes, the inflection of grateful welcome in her voice, and the marked deference she showed him in a room full of people, did please him effectually.

He responded frankly to her cordiality, and expressed a hope that the coolness now subsisting between the two families might soon be got over.

“Adrian,” he said, smiling, “must do as better men have done before him—make friends with the woman who would not have him as a husband. We cannot give up our neighbours to please him.”

Some indefinable reserve prevented Anna from saying that Adrian had already proved that he found no difficulty in this matter; it was quite evident to her quick perception that Sir Walter did not know that they had met.

“It is not Adrian that I am afraid of,” she

answered, in her low seductive voice. "There has been plenty of time for him to forget such an insignificant creature as myself; but will Miss Earle and Honour forgive me?"

Her glance and accent turned Sir Walter Earle into her advocate.

That same day after dinner, as soon as the cloth and servants were withdrawn, he opened the subject with his sister, telling her where he had been, and asking if she could not be induced to forgive the slight Anna had put upon her nephew, and offer her the civility of a call and invitation to dinner.

Miss Earle looked up sharply: it needed a mental effort to recall the difference between the real facts of the case and her brother's partial knowledge of them.

"It strikes me as a little inconsistent," continued Sir Walter, "that you should bear the girl so much ill-will, Bella, when the step she took in Adrian's little affair was the only one that would have pleased you."

Miss Earle reddened, and glanced towards Honour. To see the colour fading from that

dear face, and the veiled look of pain in her eyes, hardened her heart against Anna Methuen. Evidently she was averse to any renewed intercourse with the Methuens. How, indeed, could she, with any regard to dignity and peace of mind, meet the man who had sacrificed her to the shameless exigence of another woman ?

It had always seemed to Miss Earle's robust good sense that it would have been better that the truth had been generally known, at least to Anna herself and the members of their own family ; but she had yielded the point to the urgent representations of the girl whom she considered to have been so cruelly wronged, and whose love, after the interval of all these months, seemed neither to have waxed nor waned. Honour still held by her inflexible belief in Methuen's worth, which had irked and irritated Miss Earle all along. But the necessity of keeping the secret to which she was pledged made her say—

“I do not quarrel with Anna because she rejected Adrian—that is the one point in her favour—but because I never liked her, and was

wearied and disgusted by her selfishness and arrogance when she was our guest last year."

"Oh, my dear, you may feel sure that Lady Methuen will be better behaved than Anna Trevelyan. We can never, for the sake of 'auld lang syne,' have them living at Methuen Place as strangers. The neighbours will talk. Also, you seem to have forgotten how valuable Methuen's kindness was to our poor Oliver."

"I admit that as an argument," said Miss Earle, with an impatient sigh; "but I am not at all sure they would be such good friends in the future. You know you all liked Philip Methuen a great deal better than I."

"I am prepared to own he is a man who has disappointed me a little," was Sir Walter's answer. "He is evidently not going to make the figure in the world I expected, though I learn there is still a chance of getting him into Parliament under the Norfolk patronage, only they must make haste about it. Honour would tell you that we met him and Sainsbury in the Park yesterday. He struck me as very much altered."

Miss Earle cast a swift glance of grieved surprise upon Honour, but she answered loyally, without the hesitation of a moment—"Since yesterday morning we have been in such a whirl of petty engagements that we have not had the chance of five minutes' private conversation. We will discuss this matter, Honour and I, at our ease presently, for we are rejoicing in a quiet evening at home; but are you quite sure it would be well-advised to expose Adrian to Lady Methuen's influence?"

Sir Walter lifted his eyebrows.

"He must take his chance about that. If he does not meet her in this house he will meet her elsewhere. He is a little too old to be kept in leading-strings."

As soon as the two women were alone together, Miss Earle turned her grave reproachful face full upon Honour.

"Is this man to come between us and rob me even of your trust?" she asked. "Why did you not tell me of this?"

"Why?" repeated Honour; "why?"—and there was an accent almost of despair in her

voice,—“because I thought I would be brave, and try and keep my misery to myself; but—I should have told you. It is too strong for me after all.”

She went up to Miss Earle with a look in her eyes such as the latter scarcely remembered to have seen in them even on the day of that terrible separation, and then suddenly bowed her face upon her shoulder.

“What will you think of me?” she said. “After all—this long time—when I believed the worst was over—I am not sure I shall be able to go on—living my life!”

The voice was sharp with the poignant accent of pain; the figure round which the other had thrown her arm was shaken with sobs—not the facile hysteria of an emotional woman, but those which tell of the breaking up of fountains hitherto rigidly sealed.

Miss Earle’s keen delicate face changed and quivered. She found it hard not to weep too, with this girl whom she loved so fondly; but she controlled herself, and stood for a few moments quite silent, and stroking with in-

effable tenderness the head bowed on her neck.

“My darling,” she whispered fondly, “I was always afraid how it would be when you met. God forgive me, but I could curse this man !”

“Him !” said Honour, with a sort of dull surprise—“him ! He is cursed already. I—I never hated her until yesterday.”

She lifted up her face as she spoke, and Miss Earle saw, with almost a shock of surprise, how pale and stern it was.

“Did he complain of his wife ?” she asked, with a sneer. “Did he dare to refer to your past relations ?”

“He did not complain of her. He said she behaved well and was happy, and that he was able to take pleasure in his daily work. But I—I offered to be friends with Anna, and besought him to let us meet sometimes. He refused.”

“And am I then to understand, my poor child, that you have looked forward to a renewal of intercourse with the Methuens ? Could you endure it ?”

“ I could not only endure it,” was her answer, “ but I do not think I can endure to give up the idea. Sometimes to see him, so that I can judge for myself whether his life is bearable—or, at least, how he bears it—is necessary to help me to bear my own. You—mother ! more almost than that—you will believe that I could do this without injuring—Anna, I was going to say, but I will say without wronging my own self or him by a single thought ?”

“ My dear, it would be harder than you think—at least for him.”

“ So he said ; but I have thought the matter out, and—he must be convinced that he is wrong. Picture him shut up in Methuen Place—with her—which is so full of cruel memories for him. Chief of all, the memories of the old uncle he loved so much, and who died happy, thinking he had made his happiness sure. That thought alone must be terrible to bear and—hide.”

“ Honour, these fine agonies don’t pierce men’s hearts like ours ; he will have his out-

lets. Also, he has married a very beautiful woman: she has probably consoled him by this time."

"Ah!" said Honour, "that does not touch me. I only wish she had, and I would forgive her everything. If Anna could make Philip happy, God knows I would rejoice and be glad; you should not hear a word of complaint or regret from me then."

Miss Earle was silent; stroking delicately the hand she held.

"Tell me, dear, what passed between you, if you can, that has so opened up the floodgates of your grief. My pet! I had thought you were beginning to be content."

"I think I was, cheating my own soul by telling myself he would forget me and be happy. What passed? Very little; only he looked as if the fight had been—harder even than I feared—very much altered, as Sir Walter puts it; and he looked at me and spoke to me simply under compulsion. That is," dropping her voice, "I saw that he could scarcely bear it."

“ And your logical conclusion is that it would do him good to be forced to bear it ? ”

“ I think that if he could be induced to bear it until it ceased to be painful—if he could take up his old relations with us all—be Adrian’s friend again, and kind and helpful as in the days gone by—it would be better for him. You see,” she went on persuasively, “ he is too much alone, concentrating his strength on one point only—doing his daily duty without ease or distraction. Don’t you understand, dear ? ”

“ I understand quite well that you are of the same mind as Sir Walter; you wish me to be civil to his wife, and open our doors to her again. You would like to call upon Lady Methuen to-morrow, and invite them to our next Tuesday’s dinner ? My child, he would decline.”

“ No doubt he would decline ; but it would be a breaking of the ice, and when we are all at home again, things might fall into the old groove. If you love me, let us put it to the proof.”

Miss Earle knitted her delicate brows.

“And have you nothing to fear from Anna’s jealousy? You will be complicating the troubles of this man if you excite that girl’s suspicions.”

“Can you not trust me?” she asked. “Of him I am sure. Besides, her suspicions would surely be aroused if we all stood aloof from her.”

“I am not convinced, Honour. I think you are setting yourself a task beyond your strength; but you shall have your own way in the matter.”

Two days after this conversation, when Methuen entered his wife’s drawing-room at the hour of five-o’clock tea, Anna said, as she handed him a cup—

“You have just missed some old friends. Miss Earle and Honour Aylmer have been here.”

She looked at him steadily as she spoke, but in his intercourse with his wife Philip seldom put off his armour. In spite of the secret spasm of painful surprise, he answered without embarrassment or hesitation—

“Then I am to understand that we are to

accept the visit as a formal offering of the olive-branch? Ah, Lady Andrew Pattison, I beg your pardon. I did not see you for the moment. Anna excludes the light almost too rigorously."

The lady in question was standing in one of the deep recesses of the window, gazing out into the street. She had risen from her chair in order to command a better survey of the Earle equipage, which she had been criticising to her hostess with her usual air of arrogant finality, and the folds of the heavy curtain had concealed her figure.

"Oh, I excuse you readily," she answered, "being accustomed to be overlooked wherever Lady Methuen is present, who has, we all know, no greater admirer than her husband."

She fixed her bold black eyes on his face as she spoke, with a smile of doubtful suggestion, and then added—

"I think myself fortunate to have met Miss Aylmer here to-day, for although much talked of—as heiresses mostly are—she is seldom seen. It has given me the opportunity of correcting

an erroneous impression. I thought, Sir Philip, you men reputed her to be a beauty?"

"I suppose there are few men," he answered, "who know less of such social estimates than I. I have never till this moment heard Miss Aylmer's beauty canvassed; and those who, like ourselves, have the honour of being her friends, are scarcely likely to be fair judges. At least," turning towards his wife, "Anna and I think her beautiful."

His smile and manner had so much of the old winning sweetness, that it checked the words that had risen to Anna's tongue. Lady Andrew continued to observe him with a peculiar expression on her face.

"Ah," she said, "I beg pardon. I did not know I trod on sacred ground. The relations of the families, then, have been more intimate than I even suspected?"

"It is a subject quite undeserving the exercise of Lady Andrew Pattison's suspicions. The facts themselves are entirely at her service. The Earles were our earliest and best friends when Anna and I first came to live in England."

“Really! I should never have gathered that from what passed just now. I thought their cordiality a little forced, though I own I never saw Lady Methuen more effusive. It is easy to see she shares your estimate of the beautiful Miss Aylmer.”

It would be a little difficult to explain the motives which actuated Lady Andrew Pattison in her relations with the Methuens; but her instinct was certainly inimical to their conjugal peace. Anna’s insolent confidence in her own beauty, and obvious disparagement of other women, herself included, had something to do with it, added to a certain fascination which Methuen possessed for her, and to the indications of which he had shown the most absolute unconsciousness. Her acuteness, too, had detected a certain want of spontaneity in the unfailing kindness of the husband to the wife, which provoked the curiosity and speculation of the idle woman of fashion.

Her last words had brought the angry colour into Anna’s cheek, and a smile of gratification at her own successful *coup* parted her lips.

“The girl rises like trout to the fly,” she said to herself, as she marked the haughty uplifting of her beautiful head; but again, and most unexpectedly, Anna held her peace, checking the eager disclaimer which had sprung to her lips, and checking it only because Philip was looking at her so kindly.

“If it were not even worse taste for a man to praise his wife than himself,” he said, smiling, “I should be inclined to answer, that Anna is fortified by nature against any jealousy of other women. Also, you must forgive my repeating that Miss Aylmer is too much our friend to admit of disinterested criticism.”

Lady Andrew Pattison coloured. “I shall take care not to offend in the future,” she said. “I see Lady Methuen has already learned the same lesson. She is dissentient, but wisely keeps her opinions to herself. Odd, isn’t it, that husbands and wives never think alike about the same people?”

“Your ladyship’s experience is so much fuller than mine,” returned Philip, “that I will not

venture to dispute the assertion, though my own crude notion was that daily intercourse tended to accommodation of sentiment."

She laughed a little, and turning towards the pier-glass, near which she was standing, began coolly to arrange her hat and veil prior to departure.

"You pick your words with discrimination, Sir Philip; accommodation is an elastic phrase." Then addressing Anna—

"He was too well advised, my dear Lady Methuen, to speak of agreement. Nine months serve as well as nine years to dispel certain illusions."

Anna shrugged her shoulders, and affected to stifle a yawn.

"I am not good at that kind of talk," she said. "I detest innuendo. Philip and I had no illusions to begin with."

"You mean that antagonism was clearly understood from the first?" asked the other, with an innocent air.

Anna's eyes flashed. "I mean, that I always loved my husband—now as well as then

—that there is no question of illusion in the matter."

She stretched out her hand towards him as she spoke, with her grand air, and Philip, meeting boldly Lady Andrew Pattison's keen glance of investigation, bowed low over it, and put it to his lips.

" 'Tis like a scene in a French play," was her rejoinder, "and I feel myself rebuked for the second time to-day—by the wife as by the husband. But I see my carriage is at your door once more, and there is a droop about old Sutton's shoulders which means sullen despair, and reminds me of the unconscionable time I have stayed. *Au revoir, ma belle*," touching Anna's cheek caressingly with her glove; "and rely on my holding myself at your disposal in regard to the Farini designs. Send for me any hour of the day or night."

Anna's response was indifferent to the verge of incivility, and as if in defiance of her guest's cynicism, she said to Philip, who was going to see her to her carriage—

“Come back again, please, as soon as you can—I have something to say to you.”

He came back as desired, but hesitated for a few moments before entering the room. He dreaded what his wife was going to tell him, for it probably bore upon her renewed intercourse with the Earle family.

He had an increasing sense of the difficulty and discrepancy of their position. He was married to a woman who adored him, and he could not love her. Had he then no magnanimity? no real faculty of self-mastery?

Since he and Honour had met a week ago, the craving of his heart, which had been held down by remorseless pressure, with righteous purpose to stamp it out, had quickened into the old vitality. The pain he felt was as sharp almost as in that first hour of separation. Persistent practice seemed to make duty no easier.

To recall the sweetness of her face as he had lately seen it, the tenderness of her voice, the divine unselfishness of her behaviour, was to

feel that more was required of him than he could bear.

They must not meet.

The desire to take her once more into his arms, and kiss the pure pathetic lips and the eyes shining with unshed tears—to try and console her for the irremediable sorrow he had cost her—would consume his life.

He vaguely wondered if other men loved other women as he loved Honour Aylmer. Not beautiful! Anyway, no other of God's creatures was so formed to meet the most subtle and intimate requirements of his being. He had told her that, so long as he drew the breath of life, no other love would touch him. It was just as true at that moment as when the words first left his lips: he had no power to change.

He heard a movement in the room within, as if Anna had risen and was approaching the door.

Could he go in and talk to her? Was not his life an ignominy and a lie? And if it were, was it his doing that honour and integrity had

been out of his reach? And this was the outcome of the long training of his youth—of the holy ambition and sacred dreams of his early manhood. This!

“God! I grope in the dark,” he said inwardly; “but I did not choose darkness.”

He opened the door and went in.

END OF THE SECOND VOLUME.



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